

**THE
VANISHED
PROSPECTOR**

BY

T. LUND

AUTHOR OF
"WESTON OF THE
ROYAL NORTH-WEST
MOUNTED POLICE"
ETC.

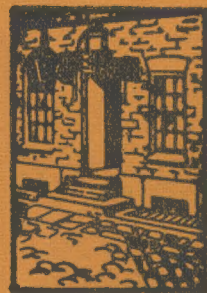
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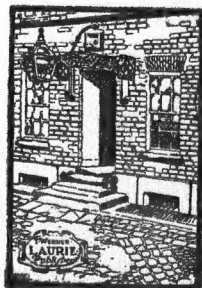
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THE VANISHED PROSPECTOR

A STORY FROM NORTHERN CANADA



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LONDON

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TO
DR. AND MRS. H. LUND
ELVERUM NORWAY



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CHAPTER I

CORPORAL JAMES MASON of the Royal North-West Mounted Police, Portage Bend Detachment, was walking rapidly along the top of the bank of the Saskatchewan River, which rose steeply from the river-bed upwards for about twenty feet. Mason had been down to the Northern Lumber Company's mills to interview certain gentlemen with regard to a recently discovered effort of smuggling into the town a consignment of contraband liquor. As Portage Bend was one of the gateways to the North, the Government had prescribed the town "dry territory". The idea was, of course, to prevent a too easy flow of liquor into the town, a flood which might easily spread to the numerous Indian Reserves scattered around in the wide and large territory north of Portage Bend. Of course, respectable citizens, who were not members of any band of Indians, could get their liquor. But all consignments had to pass through the hands of the Police, and the consignee had to collect personally his parcel at the Police Barracks. In this way the Police would be able to see to it that no liquor fell into the hands of the unrighteous and iniquitous, who might subsequently sell the forbidden stuff to Indians.

As a consequence, a rather flourishing and hectic industry of bootlegging and smuggling had sprung up in the town. It was the most exacting task the local Police Detachment had to cope with to try to stamp out this industry—and the most hopeless. As soon as one "blind pig" was discovered and mopped up, one and often more would immediately spring up to replace it. And as soon as one gang of smugglers had been broken up, another stood ready to take its place.

It was altogether a problem which it was impossible to

deal with with any semblance of success, as booze could be run into the town during the winter over the numerous trails which traversed the forest surrounding the little town on all sides. And during the summer the numerous rivers and streams, which formed tributaries to the Saskatchewan River, formed convenient routes of transport for smugglers. The only liquor the Police could actually supervise and control was the "respectable booze", which entered the town honestly and unblushingly via the railway which linked Portage Bend up with the rest of the world three days per week through its branch line from Portage Junction.

Corporal Mason was grumbling to himself as he strode along. He had been stationed at Portage Bend for four years, and these eternal inquiries into booze-smuggling and bootlegging bored him to tears, as he had been heard to confess on numerous occasions with variations and embroideries.

But there were compensations in doing duty up at this frontier town. There were long patrols up into the northern wilderness, by canoe in summer and dog-trains in winter, when one was away from Portage Bend for a month and more at a time, free and unhampered, and far removed from such sordid matters as smuggling, bootlegging, and drunken brawls. And shortly the corporal was to start out on one of these Northern Patrols, and with luck he might be able to stretch the trip to last a couple of months or so. And who knows? Perhaps Fate would be kind enough to put some adventure in his way to help liven up an otherwise humdrum existence.

This was one of the last days of January, and the country was in the middle of winter's icy grip. The frozen snow crunched sharply under Mason's moccasins as he swung along. It was a bright but snappy day, with the thermometer registering 37 below zero. The bright sun did its best to try to raise the temperature; but its efforts were completely abortive. The cold remained an easy winner, aided and abetted as it was by an icy breeze which came streaming down from the frozen wastes of the North.

Corporal Mason had the flaps of his regulation fur cap pulled well down over his ears, and his short, double-

breasted fur coat with its frogs was tightly buttoned up to his throat.

The corporal was a well set-up young man of around twenty-six, an inch or so short of the six-foot mark. He had an open, pleasant face. A pair of somewhat lazy brown eyes utterly belied the adventurous, even reckless spirit, and shrewd, observant mind behind. He had been born at a vicarage in Kent, England, and his chosen career had led this offspring of the prosaic English country vicar into some queer, stirring, and utterly unecclesiastical paths.

Presently the corporal halted his steps at a point where a broad, smooth track led down the sharply sloping bank to the river below. This was the take-off of all the dog-trains which left the town headed for both far and near. Down on the snow-covered ice the broad run-way unravelled itself into several narrow ribbons of sleigh-tracks which spread fan-wise towards several points on both river-banks. But one pair of twin ribbons continued straight up the middle of the river towards the north-west. They formed the main trail up to the Northland, and that was the trail the corporal was to take shortly.

The Saskatchewan River was wide here. Its white expanse of snow-covered ice was fully one mile wide from bank to bank, and at some points even more than that. Both banks were lined with dark, sombre-looking spruce-trees, fringes of the deep, illimitable northern forests, through which the river ploughed a wide gash. The course of the river the last two miles before it reached Portage Bend formed an almost straight line slanting down from the north-west. Just above the town, however, it changed its course first northward and then eastward in a sweeping curve around the town which was situated at the concave shore of the curve. And from this curve, or bend, the little town had got its name.

The town itself was a level clearing in the forest which embraced it on three sides. Between the last buildings of the town and the river-bank was an open, empty plateau, some hundred yards wide. The town seemed to have started its existence in the more sheltered parts of the clearing and had then slowly and reluctantly overflowed

towards the river. On the river-bank itself were only the Northern Lumber Company's mills, a few warehouses, and the cluster of white buildings which comprised the Hudson's Bay Company's stores. The last named were situated almost on the very edge of the bank, not far from where the corporal was standing. The buildings actually rested on the very site where the Gentlemen Adventurers into the Hudson's Bay had erected a stockaded fort more than two centuries earlier.

For a few minutes the corporal stood idly watching a few dog-teams running along the trails down on the river. Then he pulled out his watch, and when he saw the time, he turned abruptly away, and headed towards town. In fifteen minutes the tri-weekly train was scheduled to arrive at the depot, and it was one of his duties when in town to grace that event with his presence. Partly he had to supervise the transfer of booze-consignments to the Barracks, and partly he had to watch the human cargo the train might disgorge, to see if there should be any known black sheep which intended to swell the local contingent of undesirables. The depot was situated on the opposite outskirts of the town, but even so it was only a short quarter of a mile away, so the corporal had still plenty of time to get there, especially as the train was seldom less than ten minutes late.

The depot presented its usual appearance for train-time when the corporal arrived. Scattered groups of lumber-men in mackinaw coats and woollen toques, half-breeds and Indians in caribou coats, with fur caps of many varied and weird shapes crowning their heads, and ordinary citizens in conventional winter garb, thronged the platform. The arrival of the train was one of the major important events at Portage Bend, so the inhabitants invariably turned out in strong force to honour the occasion. Especially as the hour of arrival was fixed so conveniently at 12.30 p.m., just when people were enjoying the relaxation of the dinner hour and could spare the time.

The corporal passed along the platform, exchanging nods and greetings with almost everybody. With only a very few exceptions he knew them all. Some of the

rougher elements might almost be termed intimate acquaintances, as on numerous occasions it had been his duty to arrest them for intoxication, fighting, or generally both. But these intermezzos were on both sides regarded as mere affairs of routine, which left no ill feeling.

Up near the express office he stopped where a horse and sleigh had drawn up. The driver was a constable of the Detachment, a red-cheeked, blue-eyed youngster, who looked sixteen, but who had a birth-certificate to prove he was actually nineteen, though several of his comrades in the Police had from time to time cast grave aspersions on the authenticity of that document. He was a little shorter than the corporal, but his general physique appeared to be excellent. He was a new-comer to the Detachment, and so far the Canadian North had been a closed book to him. But he had hopes that some day the book would open its pages to him.

"Hullo, Grayson," grunted the corporal. "Anything new around the Barracks since I left this morning?"

"No fear. Everything has been depressingly quiet. Seems to me it's always quiet around here," answered Grayson lugubriously.

The corporal grinned.

"Just wait, old son. There will be some Russian holidays shortly, and then you'll see plenty of action," he told Grayson. "We have got quite an extensive colony here of Russians and Mid-Europeans, and when those lads celebrate they do so with considerable vim and vigour. You'll need a rest-cure after it's all over. It's only one brawl after the other down in those shacks where those fellows hang out, and you'll have to be on the job night and day to break them up. Oh, rather. You'll get plenty of action."

"Well, any sort of action is better than none," retorted Grayson philosophically. "Since I came here all the excitement I've had is to drive this plug up to the station three times per week to collect booze. One helluva life, I call it!"

"I can't see what you are kicking about, young feller. You've only been here a week or so."

"Sixteen days," corrected Grayson firmly.

" All right. Sixteen days, then. You can't expect the town to start a riot or a crime-wave or some such rot just to keep you amused. Be fair, old thing. Anyhow, you'll soon be sent out with one of us old-timers on the trail to learn your way about, and after that I don't think you'll have to kick so hard against——" The corporal broke off. From the depths of the forest had come the shrill whistle of the expected train.

Mason consulted his watch.

" H'm. Looks as if the train is only going to be a few minutes late to-day," he muttered. " Wonder why the engineer is in such unseemly hurry? "

" The engine is probably running away," commented Grayson sarcastically. " I can't imagine anybody hurrying to get to this dam' hole."

The corporal laughed as he put his watch back into his pocket.

" You certainly are a bright and cheerful person to-day, young Grayson," he remarked. " But even so I must now leave you. Duty calls. And besides, if I stay with you any longer I'll break down and weep. So-long. I'll see you after the train comes in."

The corporal went over and took up his favourite stand near the entrance to the station-agent's office. From that particular point of vantage he knew he could keep an eye on all those getting off the train.

He had been standing there only a minute or two when with a final triumphant blast from its whistle the train burst into view from the forest, and bustled importantly towards the depot. It was enveloped in clouds of white vapour, caused by escaping steam which condensed immediately it hit the freezing air.

With much grinding of brakes, and noisy hissing of escaping steam the train finally came to a bumpy halt alongside the platform. Apart from the engine it consisted of several freight-cars, one day-coach, and another car which was half day-coach and half express-car.

The passengers immediately began to alight. There were all in all about twenty. A few drummers, some lumber-jacks, and quite a few who looked like prospectors or trappers. Nothing interesting so far from the corporal's

point of view. However, the last passenger to disembark aroused his interest to an unusual degree. This passenger was a young girl, carrying a light suitcase in her hand. And Mason noticed that she looked both smart and attractive. She wore a fur coat, and on her head a fur toque which looked very becoming. The corporal also decided that she was a stranger in these parts. The curious and uncertain glances she cast around the platform were typical of a person who finds himself or herself on alien soil.

While he was still watching the girl, idly speculating on who she might be and what she was doing up at Portage Bend, he saw her go up to the station-agent and say something to him. The agent turned about, looked towards the corporal, and then turned back to the girl. He said something to her, at the same time jerking his finger towards Mason. The girl seemed to thank him with a smile, and then she began to walk straight towards the corporal.

The latter watched her approach with rather mixed feelings. He had never had much to do with girls. Since he joined the Police his life had mostly been spent at places and under conditions which precluded any but the most casual intercourse with the opposite sex. So to him girls were an almost unknown quantity, and consequently he was rather shy in their company and rather wary of them. But even so he noticed that this particular girl actually appeared more attractive-looking the nearer she got. In fact he was quite willing to admit that she was pretty. She was not very tall, but she appeared to have a trim, slim figure. And, what Mason observed with a sense of relief, she appeared friendly and pleasant, not a bit superior or stuck-up like quite a few girls he had seen in the past.

"Excuse me," she said, stopping in front of the corporal, and looking up at him with a smile that revealed nice, even teeth. "You belong to the Mounted Police, do you not?"

"Yes, ma'am," confessed Mason, as he saluted. "I'm Corporal Mason."

"And I'm Miss Warner," retorted the girl. Her manner appeared so wholly natural and unaffected that Mason

immediately approved of her. "Are you in command of the Police here?" she asked.

"Not quite," answered Mason with a smile. "In fact, not by a long shot. Inspector Weston is in charge of our local Detachment."

"Oh, I see. Do you think it would be possible for me to see him on a personal matter? You see . . ." She hesitated for a moment, a shadow crossing her face. "You see it is like this," she continued. "I want to see him about a man who went up into the north country a few months ago. He was due back a month ago, but I haven't heard a word from him since he left. And I'm afraid something has happened to him. I want to ask your chief if he could give me any advice as to how to start investigations for this missing person. Do you think it would be possible for me to see him about this matter?"

"Oh, absolutely," answered Mason promptly. "Inspector Weston will be only too pleased to render you any assistance he can in the matter." While he was talking he speculated idly on who the missing man might be. A lover or fiancé, most likely, he decided, and for some reason this reflection did not appear quite pleasing to him.

"I'm glad to hear that," said Miss Warner. "On the train-journey up here I had some misgivings. I thought that, perhaps, a private matter like this would be outside the scope of the Police. Could you please tell me how to get to the Inspector's office? You see, I'm an utter stranger here," she explained with a deprecating smile.

"Oh, certainly. I'll give you the necessary instructions to find our Barracks. That is where the Inspector has his office. But you won't find him in his office just now. He'll be away for his dinner, and he won't be back before two o'clock. If you come down to the Barracks a little after two I'll arrange for you to see him at once."

"Oh, thank you ever so much, Corporal. And where do I find your Barracks?"

"Come this way, please, and I'll show you," said Mason, turning up the platform towards the end of the station building. "Oh, I say. Let me carry that," he suddenly exclaimed, reaching for the suitcase she was still carrying in her hand.

"No, don't bother. It's really quite light," protested Miss Warner.

"I can't really permit you to lug a suitcase while you are walking with me," insisted Mason. "It wouldn't be decent. It really wouldn't."

"Oh, well. If you feel that way about it, I suppose I must let you have your way," laughed Miss Warner, handing the article under dispute to him.

The platform was by now almost empty except for the station officials, who were unloading the express car, and trucking the freight into the shed. Grayson was still standing where the corporal had left him. He had been an interested and very envious observer of the meeting between the girl and the corporal.

"Hec of a note!" he muttered to himself with considerable feeling. "Here I have to hang around in the cold, holding on to this old nag, while the corporal is entertaining pretty girls. Look at them! Laughing and chatting like a couple of fools. And, dash it all! if he isn't marching off with her, and leaving me to do his dirty work. A bit thick, I call it!" He felt hurt, betrayed, fed-up, and considerably cold. He was mollified a little, a very little, when he saw the couple stop at the opposite end of the station building. Perhaps he wasn't going to be quite deserted after all.

In front of the depot was a fairly wide expanse of cleared space, which, however, was surrounded on all sides, except for the part bordering on the railway-yard, by tall spruce-trees. Even the nearest houses of the town itself were hidden behind a screen of trees. Mason was pointing out over this space as he gave Miss Warner directions.

"You see those two roads leading out of the clearing over there? They are really the beginning of two of our main streets. They go right through the town to the river-bank at the other extremity of our flourishing metropolis. Our happy home, otherwise the Police Barracks as the building is popularly called, is located on the left-hand side of the farther of the two streets, about ten minutes' walk from here. You can't miss it. That is, you could easily miss it if it wasn't labelled," he amended

with a grin. "The building is really only a one-storey, somewhat glorified, large wooden shack, like the majority of the buildings on the street. But it has got a sign hanging over the front door with R.N.W.M.P. painted on it. So just watch for the sign and step right in."

"Thanks very much. I shall be there shortly after two as you suggested. And now, if I may bother you with another question: Which is the best hotel in town?"

"The Palace is the best. But don't expect it to live up to its pretentious name in any way. Between ourselves that label is a gross libel on any palace, be it ever so humble. But it is easily the most comfortable in town, though that isn't saying much. It is on the same street as the Barracks, also on the left-hand side, and two blocks nearer to the depot."

"Thank you so much for your kindness to a stranger," smiled Miss Warner. "I'll go along to the hotel now, and see if they can give me something to eat."

"Wait a minute, Miss Warner. The handy-man from the hotel will be around here somewhere. There he is over there." He indicated a rough-looking, burly fellow, who was loading some heavy trunks, obviously the luggage of some drummer, into a sleigh which was drawn up alongside Constable Grayson's outfit. "He can give you a lift up to the hotel."

"I think I'll rather walk," said Miss Warner. "I feel a little stiff after the train-journey. It isn't far, is it?"

"Oh, no. You can walk there comfortably in five minutes or so. I'm sorry I can't go along with you and show you the way; but I have some matters to attend to here at the depot. But I'll give your suitcase to the man from the hotel so he can bring it up. No need of you carrying it."

"Thank you so much. Well, good-bye for the present, Corporal."

"Good-bye, Miss Warner."

As soon as Mason had seen her started in the right direction, he picked up her suitcase and walked down the platform. He rather suspected that Grayson was beginning to feel impatient by now. Nor was he far wrong.

"Say, Corporal. Who was the young lady?" asked

Grayson as soon as Mason got up to him. He had been burning to ask that question since he had first seen the girl, so he wasted no time on diplomatic preliminaries.

"She's a Miss Warner. She's up here to see the Inspector on some business. That's all I know about her," explained Mason briefly.

"Oh, hee!" exclaimed Grayson, profound disappointment in his voice. "I hoped she was some friend of yours, and that you might introduce me to her."

The corporal looked down at Grayson with a superior grin. A very superior grin, in fact. A particularly nasty leer, decided Grayson, immediately beginning to feel hot under the collar. Something whispered to him that the grin was only a prelude to some libellous and particularly nasty remark, and he was not wrong.

"My dear young Grayson," said the corporal with lofty, paternal patronage in tone and manner. "Do you really think that I would ever put the temptation of cradle-snatching in Miss Warner's way? Be fair, Grayson. You really couldn't expect me to be a party to a low trick like that."

"Where do you get that cradle-snatching from?" asked Grayson hotly. His youthful appearance was a very sore point with him. "You aren't more than five or six years older than me, you big stiff!"

"Perhaps you are right as far as actual years are concerned," conceded the corporal, simply exuding maddening superiority with every word. "But think of the years, and years, and still more years of experience I'm ahead of you. In fact, laddie, basing our difference in ages on the matter of experience, I could easily be your grandfather. Though I am willing to admit that if you grew a crop of juicy whiskers," he continued, frankly and critically scrutinizing the fuming Grayson's cherubic countenance, "you might look almost grown up."

Grayson found it utterly useless and futile to stay on the defensive against such base methods of attack, so he quickly switched to the offensive.

"You know, Corporal," he said sweetly and confidentially, "you would have been a rather good-looking fellow, except for one thing."

"Except for what thing?" asked Mason incautiously.

"Except for your face. If it had been entirely different, and if it was improved about one hundred per cent., you wouldn't have looked half bad," jeered Grayson, feeling very pleased with himself.

"That so?" drawled Mason, grinning wider than ever, much to Grayson's annoyance. "Oh, well, my chee-ild, I'm afraid you are not old enough yet to recognize manly beauty when you see it. But you'll learn as you grow up. However, let that pass. I have to hand this suitcase to the handy-man from the hotel, and then I have to get hold of the station-agent and get down to business. I'm a hard-working man, I am, and not a babe of comfortable leisure like you. And besides, I'm confoundedly hungry and want my dinner at an early hour."

Corporal Mason was in a very thoughtful and introspective mood during his dinner. He was the sole occupant of the table reserved for the members of the Detachment at the Chinese restaurant, which served the best meals in town. His brother officers had finished their meal and had departed by the time he arrived. Grayson had eaten his dinner before he left for the Depot. So there was nobody to distract his chain of earnest thought.

Nice girl that Miss Warner, he mused. Good-looking, and easy to talk to. Among the few girls he had met in the past there had been some who had made him feel stupid and inferior. And, consequently, he had kept his mouth firmly closed for fear of seeing derisive smiles blossoming forth if he dared open it, when he found himself face to face with any belonging in that category. But Miss Warner belonged to an entirely different type. It had been as easy and effortless to chat with her as it would have been to chat with a male pal. He had even derived more pleasure from his little chat with Miss Warner than he had ever had from chatting with a pal, he confessed frankly.

Mason had always up to now rather pitied those of his comrades in the Police who got married. He had been heard to contend that marriage would tend to cramp a fellow's style and hamper his career. But to-day, giving the matter due and serious consideration, he did not feel

quite so sure that he had been right after all. He could well imagine what a pleasure it would be on returning from an arduous journey in the wilds to be welcomed back by a girl like Miss Warner, and to have her greet him with one of those smiles which had so much fascinated him up at the depot. A fellow really ought to feel at the top of his form with a girl like that beside him to encourage him. And it would probably prove to be a spur to greater ambition and efforts rather than a hindrance. Hadn't all the bigwigs in history had some woman by their side to urge them on to greater deeds? Absolutely! And that certainly proved something. So perhaps a fellow would be far better off married to some nice girl like Miss Warner, for instance, than if he was mucking around on his lonesome. . . .

"Oh, hec!" he suddenly interrupted his copious flow of thought, while a wide grin spread over his face. Here was he, a hard-boiled police corporal, waxing romantical, he derided himself. And all over a girl whom he had only seen for a few minutes, and who was in all probability promised to somebody else. That fellow she was so anxious to locate, most probably. Or if not him, there would almost certainly be someone else. Girls as attractive as Miss Warner were certain to have suitors by the dozen. Better concentrate on his job and forget all about sticky romance and that sort of rot, he decided manfully. After to-day he would probably never see or hear anything of Miss Warner again, and in a few days that peculiar, vague unrest she had stirred in his mind would be quite forgotten. Yes, sir! Absolutely and completely dead and forgotten.

CHAPTER II

As soon as Corporal Mason had finished his meal he returned to his desk in the main office at the Barracks, which he shared with the Inspector. And he at once started to write out his report about his inquiries down at the lumber mill that morning.

He had just finished his report and was reading it through when Inspector Weston entered the office a few minutes before two o'clock. The corporal sprang to "attention", and brought his heels together with as much military snap as possible for a man wearing moccasins on his feet.

"Well, Corporal, how did you make out this morning?" asked Inspector Weston, while the corporal helped him out of his fur coat.

"I have just finished the report, sir."

"Never mind the report. I'll read that later. Just give me a brief outline."

"Well, sir, as usual the men weren't much inclined to talk . . ."

"They wouldn't be," interrupted the Inspector cheerfully, as he walked over to his desk and sat down. "It would be quite contrary to human nature for any man to give information which would serve to close the tap of his booze-supply."

"Quite so, sir. But I did pick up a few scraps of useful information nevertheless. And I'm pretty certain from what I heard that Joe Brodeur, the half-breed, is at the back of the latest smuggling epidemic. But I haven't been able to pick up one scrap of direct proof yet."

"All right. We'll set a trap for Mr. Brodeur one of these bright days, and get him good and proper. And

when we've got him we have to begin getting ready for the next smuggling gang. And after that for the next. And so on, so forth. A bright, cheerful, perpetual merry-go-round. The Government might as well lift the liquor restrictions for this town at once, for all the good they do. To us they just mean one eternal round of work and worry that gets us nowhere."

"Quite right, sir. Besides they make criminals out of a lot of persons, who are really rather decent at heart."

"Just so. Anything else of interest, Corporal?"

"A young lady got off the train to-day, sir. She asked me where she could find you. She said she wanted to consult you with regard to a chap who apparently has got lost up in the North somewhere. I told her to be here shortly after two o'clock, sir."

"All right. What sort of a young lady was she? I mean, did she appear to be one of the nervous, worrying type, the sort of person who rushes off to notify the Police if some member of her family is five minutes late for supper? You know, we have been started off on one or two wild-goose chases in the past by that type of female. And while we were hunting high and low for the dear, bemoaned missing sheep, the latter would generally return safe and sound to the old homestead in the meantime. I hope this is not going to turn out to be that sort of affair."

"I hardly think so, sir. She didn't strike me as belonging to that type of woman at all. She appeared to be a very sensible and capable sort of girl."

"Girl?" The Inspector looked questioningly at Mason.

"Yes, sir. She introduced herself as Miss Warner."

"Did she say where she came from?"

"No, sir. I only saw her for a few minutes. She told me she was a stranger here, though."

"Oh, well. We'll hear what she's got to say when she gets here. Anyhow, it will be your funeral, Mason," remarked Weston with a smile. "If there is anything to her story it will be your business to make inquiries about the missing person when you go out on patrol next week."

"Quite so, sir. And I'll do my best to——"

He broke off and turned to the open doorway, where one of the constables had just appeared.

"A lady out in the front office to see Corporal Mason, sir," announced the constable.

"That will be your lady of the train, I expect," remarked the Inspector. "Go along and bring her right in, Corporal."

Mason found Miss Warner in the front office, which also served as main entrance hall and waiting-room. He had wondered if she would appear quite as attractive on a second look. Well, he found she did. If possible, she looked even more attractive than at their first meeting. Perhaps that was because of contrast with her present surroundings, which were the opposite to attractive. The front office had austere, white-washed walls, bare of any ornamentation when a calendar, which advertised the farm machinery of a well-known firm, is excepted. In front of the one and only window were a table and chair for the constable on duty. A long form along one wall served as seating accommodation for waiting persons. And against the back wall stood two cells of steel lattice-work, which gave the final grim touch to the general unloveliness. The corporal offered silent, fervent thanks to Fate, because the cells were at present unoccupied. It would have been about the ultimate height of rotten luck if some raving, drunken hobo had occupied one of the cells to add a further hideous touch, now when Miss Warner was here, he felt.

"Here I am, Corporal," smiled Miss Warner. "I hope I'm not too early?"

"Not at all, Miss Warner. Inspector Weston is in his office, and is ready to see you. Please step this way." He indicated the corridor from which he had just emerged, and which connected the front and the main offices.

They passed through the corridor, past the closed door half-way down which led to the barrack-room, the quarters of the corporal and the constables, and entered the main office.

"This is Miss Warner, sir," introduced Mason.

"How-do-you-do, Miss Warner," greeted the Inspector, rising from his chair. He shot a quick, appraising glance at her. The corporal was right, he decided at once. This was obviously a level-headed young woman, not given to hysteria.

"Please sit down over here, Miss Warner," he invited, indicating a chair by his desk. "Do you mind if the corporal is present during our interview, or would you rather see me alone?"

"I don't mind in the least if the corporal is present," answered Miss Warner, taking the chair Weston had indicated. "It is not at all a confidential matter I've come to discuss."

"Good. The reason I wanted the corporal to be present is because he's starting out on a northern patrol shortly," explained Weston. "And as I understand from the corporal that you want some information about a person who is at present apparently lost up in the North, he could make inquiries during his patrol."

"Oh, thank you so much. That would be splendid," exclaimed Miss Warner, smiling her gratitude at them both. "But I had better tell my story, before you decide what to do."

"Very well, Miss Warner. Go right ahead."

"I live down in Horton, a small town on the main line between Prince Albert and Portage Junction," she began.

"Oh, I know the town well," interposed Weston. "Nice little town."

"Yes, it is rather nice for a prairie town," she admitted.

"I teach school down there. My mother died several years ago, so I've only my father left. He has for many years been a prospector and miner. Joe Warner is his name."

"Oh, I say," broke in Weston. "I used to know your father well. Though I haven't seen him for several years now. Last time was up at Moose Lake, I think, some six or seven years ago, when they had a minor gold-rush up there. I was a sergeant in those days."

"Oh!" exclaimed Miss Warner, looking at Weston with renewed interest. "Are you the former Sergeant Weston? My father has told me a lot about you."

"Nothing very bad, I hope," smiled Weston.

"Oh, not at all. Dad seemed to think a lot of you. I never heard him say anything but nice things about you," she answered, smiling back at him.

"Very glad to hear that. I always found your father

a grand chap. A regular square-shooter, as we say up North. How is he getting along, and where is he now?"

"That's exactly what I've come to see you about."

"You mean it's your father who's missing?"

Miss Warner inclined her head gravely.

Corporal Mason, who had drawn a chair up to the Inspector's desk, felt peculiarly relieved and satisfied when he heard that it was a father and not a lover he might be called upon to endeavour to locate. Though he immediately felt a little ashamed at this ignoble reaction. After all, he reflected, he was only a cog in a rather efficient machine, and as such it was his sole duty to devote all his energies towards keeping that cog functioning as smoothly and competently as possible, regardless of personal sentiment and inclination. So he would have to focus his mind on business, and business only, from now on, he decided.

"I'm very sorry indeed to hear that it is your father who's missing," said Weston with ready sympathy. "Please tell us all about it, and then we'll see what we can do in the matter."

"As far back as I can remember," continued Miss Warner, "father has always been restless, and eager to roam around prospecting for gold. He was often away for almost a year at a time. I suppose he must have been fairly successful, because we have always lived comfortably, and he was able to give me an excellent education. He always used to say that as he had never had a chance of an education himself, he would see to it that his only child got the best he was able to provide.

"After mother died he became more settled, and seemed more inclined to stay at home. But as soon as I had finished my education and had obtained my present position as a teacher, the old restlessness and the urge for the roaming life of a prospector returned to him stronger than ever. I didn't like the idea of his lonesome wanderings in the wilderness, but I didn't persuade him very hard to give it up. I knew it was really the only mode of life that made him happy and contented.

"Last winter he stayed at home with me. But towards the end of the winter I noticed that he seemed unusually

restless and preoccupied. At times he was even moody, and appeared worried. He was so unlike his usual self that I asked him several times if there was anything the matter, but he answered, 'No. I guess it's only the old travel-itch that's got me,' " she explained with a smile. " He started out again in the spring, as soon as the rivers and lakes were open, and didn't return till last fall. Then he seemed in unusually good humour. He told me he was almost certain that at last he had located a mother lode he had been looking for for years, and if he was right, he would have enough money to keep us both in comfort for the rest of our lives."

" Did he tell you where he had made his strike? " asked Weston.

" No, he didn't. In fact, he was always somewhat reticent about telling where he had made a strike, even to mother while she was still alive."

" Secrecy about the location of their discoveries has always been the most prominent mental equipment of all true prospectors," commented Weston with a smile.

" That is certainly true as far as Dad is concerned," agreed Miss Warner. " But father told me that he had not actually seen the lode he appeared so enthusiastic about. The story he told me was this:

" One day towards the end of last summer he had happened to save the life of an elderly Indian, whose canoe had upset accidentally in some rapids. Father just happened along as the Indian was helplessly floundering around in the eddy below the rapids. He had evidently hit his head on a stone as he was carried along by the rapids, as he was almost senseless. Dad had no difficulty in dragging him on shore, and there he soon recovered. But Dad said that the old Indian's gratitude for this slight service was overwhelming and quite embarrassing. When he heard that Dad was a prospector he insisted that he come along with him to his village, as he had something of great interest to show him.

" When they finally got to the Indian's cabin, he showed Dad some very fine samples of gold-bearing quartz. At least, Dad said they were very fine. The Indian explained that a few years previously he had happened to

stumble on an exposed reef during a hunting trip among the hills several days' travel north of his reserve. As he was an unenfranchised Indian he could, of course, not file a claim for himself; but he had carried away with him some samples of the ore, and had kept the matter strictly to himself, thinking he might be able to make some use of it some day. Now he insisted on giving his secret to Dad, as a return for saving his life. Dad told him that was really too large returns for such a small service, but when the old Indian insisted he at last accepted."

"Did your father give you the name and location of the reserve on which the Indian was living?" asked Weston.

"No. But he told me the occupants were Cree Indians."

"I see. I understood you to say that your father had not seen the vein the old Indian had discovered. He didn't go right up to the place then?"

"No. His provisions were at that time very low, he told me. And he was afraid that freeze-up time was not so very far away, so there was the danger that he might get trapped up there. And with the scanty supplies he had, that would have been disastrous, he explained. So he decided to take the samples down south with him, and have them assayed. And then he would go right back up as soon as the winter trails could be used. His Indian friend had given him such detailed and explicit instructions about finding the place, that he would be able to locate it in his sleep, maintained Dad.

"As soon as he got home he sent the samples to some assayers, and when he got their report a week or so later, he was jubilant. He told me that the report was even far better than he had dared hope for. And he said further, that from the description of the reef the Indian had given him, there was no doubt in his mind that it was the outcrop of a mother lode, which father had long suspected to exist up somewhere in that country. And he was certain that at least a modest fortune was within his reach.

It was one of the first days of November when Dad got the report from the assayers. He told me that he had to

go down to Winnipeg at once to attend to some matters of business before he started for the North. He left the next day. A few days later I received a letter from him, requesting me to express his trail outfit, as he calls it, up to Portage Bend for him. He explained he might not be able to return home before he left, because time was of the utmost value. He didn't dare run the risk that somebody else might stumble on the reef in the meantime.

"Then one day in the middle of November I got a letter from him posted here on the fifteenth. I have brought that letter with me, and think I'd better read it to you, if you don't mind? "

"Read it by all means, Miss Warner," said Weston promptly.

"I hope you don't think I'm too long-winded, Inspector," she asked with an apologetic smile, as she took the letter out of a handbag she was carrying. "But I want to make the whole situation quite clear to you, so that it will be easier for you to form an opinion on the whole matter."

"That's perfectly all right, Miss Warner. I like to have as many details as possible. And you're doing very well."

"Thank you. I was beginning to become afraid that I was boring you gentlemen. Well this is Dad's letter:

" 'DEAR DAUGHTER,' " she read. " 'Sorry I couldn't get home before I set out, but I heard the trails were in fine shape for travelling, so I decided to hustle. But before I leave I have a confession to make. You remember you asked me some time last winter if I was worrying about something, and I said no. Well, that was not true. I was considerably worried; but I didn't like to confess to you that your old Dad had been a darn fool. I had some money tucked away in the bank, and a fellow I know came along and talked me into going into a deal with him. He said we would both make quite a lot of money out of it. It was about some stock. Well, I was fool enough to put almost all the money I had into the deal, but it all went hay-wire, and I lost every cent I had put into it. That was what started me worrying.

And then I had very little luck last summer, and if it hadn't been for that old Indian giving me the secret of that lode, I would have felt pretty bad all around. That made things look quite bright again. But even so I was stuck for money to get an outfit together for my trip up to locate and stake the claim. There was only that little bit left I had set aside as a nest-egg for you, and I wasn't going to touch that. I'm pretty sure that what the old Indian told me is the straight goods, but I've seen so many disappointments in prospecting, so I wasn't going to touch your money in case it should prove to be a wild-goose chase after all. And I knew you would have insisted that I take it if you had known, and so I just didn't tell you. Instead I went down to Winnipeg and saw a fellow I've known for some time, and who is interested in mining. I've had some dealings with him before. When I showed him the samples and the assayers' report, he agreed to grubstake me for a half interest in the claim. That was all right with me. But what I didn't like so much was that he wanted to go along with me. He said he had done some travelling in the north country before; but he looked soft to me, and not the sort of fellow who would be any use on the trail. And as I wanted to travel fast he might be more of a hindrance than a help. I told him so; but I couldn't shake him. And as it was I couldn't very well kick too hard. But I'm going to see that he keeps up with me, even if I have to tie him on the top of the sleigh to do it. I have bought the dogs, sleigh, and outfit, and to-day this fellow is coming in on the train, and to-morrow we start. He told me we had better not let people know that we were in cahoots, because there might be people up here who knew he was interested in mining. And they might guess something was up if they saw we were partners, and then they might come trailing after us and pester us. And I said that was all right with me. So I'm pulling out on my lonesome to-morrow morning early, before daylight, and that fellow is to meet me down on the river. I won't be away long. Not more than a month or so, even if we do run into a few blizzards to slow us up. I'm just going to stake the claim this trip, and then return in the summer to do the stripping, to

find out what we have really got. So I'll be back around the middle of December, or anyhow I'll be back before Christmas sure. Now take good care of yourself, and don't worry. Your old Dad knows how to look after himself in the north country. With love, DAD.'

"I got rather upset when I got that letter," commented Miss Warner, letting the missive sink into her lap. "It was so utterly foolish of Dad not to confide in me. He ought to have used the money which was rightly his, instead of going out to borrow from strangers. My salary is ample for my needs, and I'm carrying an insurance against sickness and accidents, so there was no reason on earth why he shouldn't have used my nest-egg, as he calls it. And then I felt uneasy because he had taken this man with him. Dad is inclined to be taken in by smooth and suave talkers. He's so straight and honest himself that he thinks every man who appears friendly is also honest. So from the first I had an uneasy feeling that Dad might have been taken in by some clever crook, who wanted to go along with him for the purpose of cheating him some way or other. And when he didn't return by the time he had promised I began to worry seriously about him. And now, when he's more than a month overdue, I feel certain something serious has happened to him."

"But really, Miss Warner, I think it is too early to worry yet," said Weston. "There are so many things to delay a man who's travelling in the north country. It may have taken your father longer than he reckoned on to locate the reef, for instance."

"Yes, I've thought of that. But on the other hand father has had one peculiarity as far back as I can remember. If he ever said that he would be back at a certain time, he invariably turned up almost to the day. And if he ever happened to be delayed for some reason or other, he always managed in some way or other to get a message down to us. I can't remember once that he ever failed before now."

"But even so, he may not have found any opportunity of sending a message," argued Weston. "The region

where his prospective claim is located must undoubtedly be in some rather remote and unfrequented locality, else some of the many roaming prospectors would have found it long ago."

"That occurred to me too," said Miss Warner, slowly and reflectively. "But even that explanation doesn't satisfy me. I can't possibly understand how Dad could have been delayed for more than a month on such a comparatively short trip as his letter suggests. I may be a fool; but I can't rid myself of a feeling that something rather ominous has happened, even something rather horrible," she ended with a slight shudder.

Inspector Weston looked at her keenly and searchingly. He could not quite understand her attitude. She looked such a sane, sensible girl, not at all the sort of woman who would become morbidly jittery without stronger justifications than those appearing from her story. He had had much experience in questioning people, and something in Miss Warner's manner while she told her story, some vague hesitancy and uncertainty at times, had led him to suspect that she was holding something back, something which she for reasons of her own did not want to disclose. And he decided to find out what that something was.

"I really don't think there is anything in what you have told us to justify your conclusion that something terrible has happened to your father, Miss Warner," he said gently. "Travellers in the north country are often delayed for many reasons on and off, and are as often as not prevented from sending out any message. It happens almost every winter that some or other of our patrols is lost sight of for a month or more. So I really see nothing in your story to indicate that your father has been delayed by other than quite natural and normal circumstances. But on the other hand, I must admit that you don't look at all the sort of person who would get seriously alarmed over a situation like this, if you didn't have stronger justification than you have shown so far," he continued with a disarming smile. "So I'm going to ask you quite frankly: Is there something more, that you haven't told us yet, that is at the bottom of your uneasiness?"

Miss Warner looked a little startled and embarrassed when Weston put this question directly to her. She looked down as if to cover her confusion. But after a short while she lifted her eyes and looked gravely and searchingly first at Weston and then at Corporal Mason, as if she were weighing them in her mind. Then again her eyes dropped to her lap, and for a few moments she sat staring down at her hands, which were toying idly with the letter she still held in her hand. She was obviously debating something in her mind. Inspector Weston remained silent. He wanted her to take her own time to come to a decision.

Suddenly she lifted her head and looked rather diffidently at the Inspector.

"You are quite right," she said hesitatingly. "There really is something else, I didn't tell you. And to be quite candid, I hadn't intended telling you, because I'm afraid you'll find it rather fantastic. I'm not even so sure that you won't think I'm slightly insane if I do tell you," she added with a little smile.

"Don't have any fears on that score," said Weston, smiling back at her. "Whatever you say, even if it does sound fantastic, I'm prepared to give your sanity a clean bill of health."

"Thank you, Inspector. That makes it easier for me to proceed." Again she hesitated for a brief moment as if uncertain how to begin. Then suddenly she asked: "Do you believe in telepathy, Inspector?"

"Telepathy?" repeated Weston, raising his eyebrows. The question took him by surprise. "Well, as it happens," he continued, "I do believe in telepathy. During the many years I've spent in the Northland I've met with many rather strange experiences, especially among the Indians, which could only logically be solved by recognizing that extraordinary phenomenon we call telepathy. Though I believe it is rather rare. Does telepathy enter into your story?"

"That is my own firm belief, at least," answered Miss Warner, gravely nodding her head. "I had a most peculiar dream, or I prefer to call it a vision, one night in the latter part of November. On the night before the

twenty-third, to be exact. In my dream I saw a snow-covered landscape. It was a hilly, rough sort of country with craggy ridges divided by deep, steep ravines. Here and there were open areas which looked like frozen, snow-covered lakes or swamps in amongst the hills. But the outstanding feature of the picture was a dominating, white, rugged ridge, quite bare of trees except for a clump of three spruce-trees, bunched together on the highest point. Suddenly the picture seemed to rush towards me at a terrific speed, and the features of it seemed to disappear to each side as it rushed nearer, till only a patch of snow was left. And on that patch of snow lay the still body of a man, staring upwards with wide, open eyes. I knew at once the man was dead. And that man was my father. I heard myself cry out in my sleep, and then I woke up. But the picture had been so dreadfully vivid that it stood out quite vividly in my mind, even after I was fully awake. I found myself shaking all over. It had been so frightfully realistic," she said with a shudder, her face quite pale.

The Inspector and Mason sat quite still and silent, looking at her with grave sympathy.

"I switched on the light in my room, and looked at my watch," she went on. "It was half-past one, and a bright moon was shining into my room. I felt a little more quiet after a while, and put the vision down as a particularly ghastly nightmare. So I put out the light again, and settled down in bed, but I found it impossible to banish that dreadful picture from my mind. And it was well towards morning before I fell asleep again. But since then it has been impossible for me to get that horrible vision out of my mind. And that is the real reason why I got so terribly worried when father didn't return around the time he had promised. And my fear grew worse and worse as day after day passed, and he didn't come or send any message. And after a whole month had gone past without any sign or word from him the strain got so heavy that I felt I had to do something to try to find out what had happened to him. So I decided to come up here and ask your advice, as soon as I had an opportunity. I had heard that the Mounted

Police had located missing people in the Northland many times in the past. So as I could be spared from the school a couple of days, I left Horton this morning and came up here. And now, when you have heard my story, are you still prepared to give my mind that clean bill of health? " she ended with a smile, which was a little wan and tremulous.

" Yes. Quite prepared," said Weston quietly. He looked grave and thoughtful. " That was an extraordinary dream. Quite extraordinary," he commented. " And it must have been very terrifying to you. But—it may have been only a dream after all, you know. Or rather a nightmare." He thought for a few moments, then he continued. " Tell me, Miss Warner. Are you often bothered by vivid dreams or nightmares? "

" No. I'm a very sound sleeper, and don't dream often."

" I see." Again Weston pondered, then he asked her:

" Do you remember ever having had a dream in the past, which later gave you reason to believe that it might have been telepathic? I mean, have you ever dreamt of some happening, which later proved to have actually happened around the time of your dream? "

" Yes. And it is because of that this dream, or whatever you may call it, made such a strong impression on me. It happened three years ago last summer. Father was out on a prospecting trip up in the North somewhere. Then I dreamt one night that I saw father standing in front of me with his arms outstretched, an expression of terrible distress on his face. I had the feeling that he was in deadly danger, and wanted me to help him. I started up to go to him, and woke up sitting up in bed. When I looked at the watch I found it was already morning, and close to my usual hour for getting up. The dream didn't make much impression on me at the time. I put the whole thing down as a silly dream.

" When father came home that fall I one day told him about the dream I'd had. To my surprise he got a rather queer expression on his face. ' When about did you have that dream? ' he asked. I told him. ' Now, that's funny,' he said. ' You must have had that dream just

about the morning my canoe upset in some rapids.' Then he told me how his canoe had struck a stone and upset while he was shooting the rapids, how his head had struck another stone as the torrent had swept him along, rendering him half unconscious. The knock on the head also seemed to have paralysed him temporarily, for he seemed unable to move a limb to try to save himself. He was quite sure his last hour had come, and he said that all he was thinking of at that moment was me, and how I soon would be all alone in the world. But fortunately he was caught in a back-current down below the rapids, which carried him right on to a sand-bar near shore. And after a while he recovered sufficiently to be able to scramble ashore. And when we compared notes we found that all this had happened on the very morning I had had the dream, and at the same hour. So now you'll understand why this second dream upset me so."

"Yes. I can quite see that," agreed Weston. "Most extraordinary experience," he muttered, half to himself. "Most extraordinary, and interesting. But hasn't it occurred to you, Miss Warner," he addressed her, "that because of this first experience you may have given this last dream of yours greater significance than you may have otherwise done? And because of that you may have exaggerated the incident in your mind out of all proportion?"

"Yes. That has occurred to me," admitted Miss Warner. "But the fact remains that my father is missing," she added significantly.

"I wouldn't say missing, but overdue," corrected Weston. "And as I pointed out to you before, there are so many circumstances which could cause delays to a man in the north country. So to be quite candid, I really think it's too early to begin to be alarmed yet at your father's prolonged absence. If that old Indian's story was true, and your father has found a rich prospect, it is not at all surprising that he should be overdue. A real prospector loses all sense of time, place, and proportion when he makes a rich strike," he volunteered with a smile. "And above all, I wouldn't jump to the conclusion that something serious has happened to your father. He is a

man who's well able to look after himself in the wilds. There never seems to be any obstacle or emergency that these old-timers, like your father, can't handle with ease and efficiency. So I really wouldn't let myself be carried away by undue worry and anxiety, if I were you. In a few days or so I expect your father will turn up safe and sound, and properly penitent for overstaying his time-limit."

"I hope and pray he will," murmured Miss Warner.

"But in the meantime we'll do all we can to try to locate him," continued Weston. "Corporal Mason will start at once to make inquiries about town, and I've no doubt he'll soon find out something about the direction taken by your father when he left here. And he may also be able to establish the identity of his companion." An idea suddenly struck him. "By the way, Miss Warner. Do you know by which way your father came out last fall?"

"Oh, yes. He came home over Prince Albert."

"I see. And when he went back up again he started from here," murmured Weston thoughtfully. "That seems to indicate that the district he is visiting is situated somewhere to the north-west from here. That narrows the field a little. You have no further information which might prove helpful? Did your father at any time drop any hint about the location of this gold-claim?"

"No. Nothing more than I've told you already."

"Very well. We'll have to do the best we can with the information we have. When we first establish the route your father has probably followed from here, Corporal Mason can make inquiries along that route when he goes out on patrol. And I don't think he'll have much difficulty in eventually locating the exact place. How long do you intend staying up here, Miss Warner?"

"I intended to go back on the train to-morrow. Except you should want me to stay a few days for this investigation?" She looked inquiringly at the Inspector.

"No. There is no reason for us to keep you here. We'll let you know what information we pick up around town before you leave. And as soon as anything further turns up we shall at once communicate with you down at Horton."

"Thank you very much. And now I really mustn't take up any more of your time," she said, getting up from her chair. "I'm afraid I've trespassed too far already."

"Not at all," said Weston, rising. "You stated your business as briefly and concisely as possible. I only wish all our other visitors would be as brief and business-like as you," he added with a smile.

"Thank you for your compliment," smiled Miss Warner. "And thank you so much for your kindness and patience. You know, I was quite a bit nervous about coming up here to see you. I was afraid you might consider me a pest and nuisance who came to bother you with matters that were no concern of yours, and that I should be sent about my business politely but firmly."

"The locating of missing persons is very much our business, Miss Warner," said Weston. "And remember also that we are public servants. Our whole duty in the scheme of things is to aid and assist the public to the best of our ability, and to be at their service and disposal at any time when called upon. You see, after all it's the public which pays us our wages, so they certainly have a right to demand something in return," he explained with a boyish grin.

"It's a relief to hear you say that, Inspector. I should have felt pretty badly if I had walked out of here with the conviction that I'd been a nuisance and a bore." She held out her hand. "Good-bye, Inspector. And again, many thanks."

"Oh, that's perfectly all right, Miss Warner," smiled Weston, shaking hands with her. "I only hope that we shall soon be able to find your father's hiding-place. That is, provided he doesn't fool us and return home before we get on his trail. Anyhow, we'll keep in touch with you, and you must be kind enough to let us know as soon as you get any news from him, or about him."

"I certainly shall. Good-bye."

Corporal Mason escorted her to the front office. There she shook hands with him, and thanked him for being so helpful to her.

"Oh, that was nothing at all. All in the day's work,

you know," said Mason. Then, as the thought smote him with some force that he had perhaps not said exactly the right and proper thing, he added hurriedly: "Of course, it was a great pleasure to me to be of some slight service to you. And listen, Miss Warner. I'm going straight out to see what information I can pick up about your father's movements. And if you don't mind, I'll come over to the hotel later and let you know what success I have."

"That would be very nice indeed. Good-bye for the present, then. Good afternoon," this last with a smiling nod towards the constable on duty, who had up to then been a passive spectator, but who now suddenly came to life, got out of his chair, and exercised his most graceful bow.

When the corporal re-entered the main office he found the Inspector with a large-scale map of Northern Saskatchewan and Manitoba spread out on the desk in front of him.

"A courageous little woman that," he remarked, looking up from the map when Mason entered. "She's quite convinced her father is dead, but she takes it remarkably well."

"You think she does, sir? Think her father is dead, I mean?"

"I'm positive of it. Her whole manner while she was telling her story suggested that quite plainly. I'm inclined to think that she believed her father was dead from the moment she had that queer dream of hers."

"But she didn't at all strike me as a person who was inclined to be superstitious, sir," remarked Mason doubtfully.

"Well, a person can believe in telepathy without being in the least superstitious. Or perhaps you class telepathy with boggy-men, fairies, witches, necromancy, and the rest of the queer rot we call superstition?" asked Weston with a smile.

"Not exactly, sir. I've come across a few rather remarkable coincidences, which I suppose could be put down as telepathy, provided they were not merely coincidences. But on the other hand, I've had some very queer

dreams now and again, which might have been telepathy, but which later turned out to be nothing of the sort," declared the corporal stoutly.

"Quite so. But because we have a few dreams that are frauds, that is no proof that telepathy is merely superstitious nonsense. The older one gets, and the more one sees of the queer workings of the human mind, the less ready one becomes to dismiss psychic phenomena as pure nonsense. Ours is a queer world, and Man is the queerest inhabitant of it. If somebody had come to us ten years ago and had said that we would one day be able to flash messages from one place to another through the air, without any actual connection whatever, we should probably have laughed at him and put him down as a lunatic. But to-day a liner in mid-ocean sends daily messages to shore through the medium of wireless telegraphy. And if human ingenuity can fashion a mechanical device that can send impulses and messages through space and distance, why should it be so utterly impossible for a human being, who is, after all, the most finely adjusted and perfected instrument on earth, to do the same? "

"Then you suggest, sir, that a human individual should be able to send wireless messages, as it were, to other human individuals? " asked Mason, looking very dubious.

"Why not? " inquired Weston cheerfully, smiling at the expression of deep scepticism on his subordinate's face. "Provided, of course, that our faculties were trained in the right direction. Science tells us that there are the Lord knows how many million cells in our brains, and that not half of those cells are ever used by the average individual. So think of the potentialities lying idle. And you must remember that each human being is trained from the beginning of his life to develop his brain-powers only along certain well-defined paths. So think of all the avenues that lie barren and unexplored for that reason. We humans are taught to boss our brains, as it were, and show them which way to go. It is only in moments of complete mental relaxation, when we let go the guiding hand, that the brain is allowed to step out on its own, and then it takes us along strange and wonderful paths. Hence dreams and allied phenomena. It is a fact worth

noting, that among the least enlightened of humans, and among animals, we find those strange manifestations which we, for lack of a better designation, call instinct or sixth sense. Because in them the brain is allowed to function unhampered, without any strictures. So it is more than likely that there are many strange and hidden powers tucked away in our brains, that we don't even dream of." Suddenly Weston leaned back in his chair and burst out laughing. "Here we are sitting like a pair of bewhiskered college professors, gravely debating metaphysics," he chuckled, "and entirely forgetting that we are a couple of hard-boiled, materialistic policemen, who are only supposed to deal in realities. It won't do, Corporal. It won't do at all. So we had better return to our subject. Well, as the matter stands, even if Miss Warner's dream was only a common nightmare, and has no connection with telepathy at all, the fact remains that her father is long overdue. And it is our duty to find out what has happened to him."

"Yes, sir. But I don't see any reason really for supposing that something serious has happened to him. All the prospectors I've ever known seemed to have all the time in the world to nose around a likely prospect. And I suppose Warner is no exception to the rule. He'll probably return safe and sound when he's good and ready. It isn't as if he were alone. He's got that other fellow with him. So if anything had happened to Warner, that other chap would be able to help him, or at least bring out word."

"Yes. There is that about it, of course," remarked Weston thoughtfully. "But there is another side to the problem. I used to know Warner rather well in the old days. And one of his peculiarities was a passion for punctuality, a trait very unusual among the carefree wanderers of the Northland. And he also always kept any promise he had given with scrupulous fidelity. So it is really peculiar, to say the least, that he has not returned. In fact, in spite of my words of assurance to Miss Warner, I'm very much afraid that something is very wrong. You must also remember that the fellow who went along with Warner was obviously a greenhorn. So if anything hap-

pened to Warner, this other chap might be quite incapable of doing anything to help. He might not even be able to find his way out to summon help. So it is up to us to get into action. And as a first step, you'd better go along at once and try to find out which trail Warner took out of town, how many dogs he had, where he got them from, what sort of outfit he took along, and who his companion was."

"Very well, sir."

"And report back to me here. I shall be in the office till five o'clock, at least."

"Very good, sir."

CHAPTER III

As soon as the corporal had donned his furs and had left, Weston picked up a pair of compasses and drew a couple of segments of circles on the map before him with Prince Albert and Portage Bend as the respective centres. Where the two arcs intersected at a point up in the north-west he encircled an area with a pencil. Then he bent down and studied this area attentively for some time.

Presently he straightened up, tipped his chair against the wall behind him, clasped his hands behind his head, and stared thoughtfully up towards the ceiling. This was his favourite posture when pondering some problem. During his unregenerate days as a constable and N.C.O. he had indulged in the supplementary mannerism of planting his feet on whatever table or desk happened to be in front of him during such moments of absorbed study. But when he rose to commissioned rank he decided regretfully that he would have to relinquish this otherwise agreeable and comfortable habit for the future. It would have been a little compromising and humiliating if he had been caught in the act, he decided, besides being too undignified.

Ten minutes or so later he came out of his study, pushed himself back to his normal position in front of his desk, and again studied the map with a frown of concentration. Then he folded up the map and put it away. After that he started attending to the routine matters which required his attention.

Corporal Mason returned around twenty minutes before five o'clock.

"Well, Corporal. What did you find out?" asked Weston, putting aside the document he had been perusing, and which was of no immediate importance,

"First I found out that Mr. Warner had been staying at the Spruce Log Hotel, where most of the trappers and prospectors hang out when they are in town, sir. He pulled out early on the morning of the sixteenth of November. At least, he was there on the evening of the fifteenth, and had disappeared before anyone was up the following morning. He had settled his bill the night before. He had bought a team of five dogs from Joe Sayese, the half-breed. One of the best teams in town. He had bought all his provisions and equipment at MacDonald's store. At a rough calculation I should say that he had enough provisions to last him for a month and a half to two months."

"Based on one or two men in the outfit? "

"On two men, sir. Down at the Spruce Log, I was told that he had given them to understand that he intended to prospect around in the hills up in the north-east towards Churchill."

"And there he was treating truth somewhat nonchalantly, I'm afraid," observed Weston with a smile. "In the first place, not much metal has ever been discovered in those hills. Secondly, we know that he came out over Prince Albert last summer, so the location of the old Indian's reef must certainly be somewhere up in the north-west. No sane man coming from the north-east would pass by Portage Bend and paddle another three hundred miles or so up-stream on the Saskatchewan on his way out. And especially not when his provisions were short, which we know was the case with Warner then. What Warner gave the patrons at the Spruce Log to understand was only the proverbial red herring across his trail. A prospector never advertises the direction of his destination when he expects to make a rich strike. Not if he can help it! "

"I know, sir. And I didn't take any stock in what I was told," continued Mason. "Besides, I actually found out later that he had taken an entirely different direction. I had the luck to meet an Indian from up the north-western trail down at MacDonald's. So I questioned him on the off-chance that he might have seen Warner pass his village. And to my immense satisfaction he could tell

me that he had seen Warner going up the trail on the forenoon of the seventeenth. One team and two men. He didn't actually know any of the men, he said, but he knew Joe Sayese's dogs well. He said he remembered the incident so well, because he had tried to buy that same dog-team from Sayese last fall, but had found the price too high. And when he saw the team, he began to wonder who the fellows were who could afford to buy it."

"Good," exclaimed Weston. "Now we're getting somewhere. But what about the other man? Did you find out anything about him?"

"Nothing, sir. Nobody who had seen Warner up here had ever seen him associate with any stranger. All the time he was in town he had apparently only kept company with well-known old-timers. But that only bears out what Warner said in his letter. As he also said that his companion was due to arrive on the day he wrote, which was the fifteenth of November, I checked up on all persons who had registered at the three hotels that day, and especially on those who came from Winnipeg, and who had left on the following morning. But it didn't get me anywhere. None of those who came from Winnipeg, four in all, seemed to have left the following morning. But, of course, some people are rather lax about checking out, and never bother about it. And none of the clerks could remember any particular person who had arrived on the fifteenth, and who had left the following morning. But as usual around that time of the season there was such a lot of persons coming and going that it was impossible to keep track of them all."

"I see. Perhaps this chap has not even mentioned that he came from Winnipeg. He seemed to be a very cautious sort of person, judging from Warner's letters. However, we have established the two rather important facts that Warner actually had a partner with him, and that he was heading towards the north-west. But the most important thing we don't know yet—where they stopped." Weston picked up the map he had been studying earlier, and spread it on the desk. "Now look here, Corporal." Mason went up to the desk and bent over the map. "As you see, I've drawn two segments of

circles up north, there," continued Weston, pointing. "One circle has Portage Bend as its centre, and the other Prince Albert. The radius I have based on the probable distance Warner intended to travel. He said he intended to be away a month. So I have assumed that he estimated about ten days for the trip each way, and ten extra days as a margin for delays, such as locating the reef, staking the claim, and being held up by blizzards. And I should say that an old, experienced dog-musher like Warner would mean by travelling fast some thirty to forty miles a day on good trails, and from fifteen to twenty on poor trails, and considerably less than that if there was much trail-breaking to do. So for the purpose of my calculations I've fixed each day's travel at a conservative twenty miles. So I've used ten times twenty as radius for my circles. Somewhere up here where the two circles bisect each other is Warner's probable destination, as we know it must be approximately the same distance from here as from Prince Albert. Otherwise he wouldn't have come out via Prince Albert and gone in by this town. The reason he started from here is pretty obvious. It's far easier to obtain good sleigh-dogs here than in P.A.

"Now, I have encircled with my pencil the area up there where we would most likely find Warner. Provided, of course, that my calculations are anywhere near correct. That area is all hilly, rough and wild country, which has not been much visited by trappers or prospectors to my knowledge. Some parts I even believe to be practically unexplored. But, as you see, my pencil-line encloses an area which is roughly a few hundred square miles in extent. And that is a pretty wide area in which to locate two men. And we can't narrow it down for lack of data. All the further information we have is that there is an Indian Reserve several days' journey south of Warner's location. Well, that may mean anything from fifty to a hundred-and-fifty miles. And as there are quite a few Reserves and Indian settlements in that area, this information is quite useless to us.

"But if my surmises are correct, Warner and his companion would follow the main trail to Beaver Narrows, or at least as far as Moose Lake. But in that district they

may have turned off the trail most anywhere, either to left or right. So when you start out on your patrol next week, you'll have to try to pick up their trail on your way up to Beaver Narrows. You may be able to establish the place where they have turned off the trail, and discover which direction they've taken. Of course, if you manage to locate the village where Warner's old Indian friend is living, the rest would be easy. He could take you right up to the spot. But even if you don't, some trapper and hunter may have run across their sleigh-track, so with a bit of luck you shouldn't have too much difficulty in finding their destination. At least I hope so. Anyhow, it's the best we can do. But we may be able to pick up some more information before you leave. In any case we'll go through the whole case again before then," concluded Weston, folding up the map. "Anything else you want to see me about before I leave?"

"Nothing, sir. Thank you."

"Right oh. Then I shall be getting home." Weston put aside the map, and got up. The corporal helped him into his fur coat, and with a cheerful "Good afternoon!" Inspector Weston left the office.

Mason went over to his own desk to see if there was anything there which claimed his attention and action; but to his relief there was nothing of importance.

He went into the barrack-room where he found the three constables, who with Inspector Weston and himself formed the full force of the Detachment, assembled, taking their ease. The constable on duty had left his official perch in the front office for the more congenial atmosphere of the barrack-room. Through the door, which stood open on the corridor, he could hear if anybody entered by the front door. He had established his listening-post on the bed nearest the door, which proved a sound tactical judgment.

"Hello, Jimmy," grunted Constable Ross, an old crony of Mason's, who lay ungracefully but comfortably sprawled on his bed, a pipe in his mouth. "What's all the excitement about to-day? Young and comely female closeted for considerable time with the Inspector and you. You hopping around town like a flea with an itch. Some-

thing tells me important events are in the offing."

"The lady was a Miss Warner. Her father went up into the Great Alone on a prospecting trip some time ago, and has been missing for a month or so. Miss Warner came up here to ask our help to locate him. Whole story in a nutshell," vouchsafed Mason, walking over to his bed, and reaching up on the shelf above it, on which his spare uniform and other articles of clothing and equipment were neatly piled, strictly in accordance with regulations.

"Oh, is that all," growled Ross, sounding a little disappointed. "I thought it might have been something interesting."

Mason removed his hands from the shelf, and turned to Ross, an expression of strong disapproval on his face.

"Listen, Ross," he said, deep censure in his voice. "Your callousness is getting positively appalling and disgusting. Here's this poor girl worried sick about her poor father, and you brush the matter curtly aside as of being of no human interest. Haven't you got a heart at all?"

"There spoke the parson's son," mumbled Ross down his pipe-stem. "Brother Jones will now pass the collection plate for the pennies and trousers-buttons."

"Oh, you go to hell!" suggested Mason with a grin, again turning to the shelf.

He carefully lifted down his best tunic and breeches, shook them out and looked them over critically. Then he picked up a brush, which he applied vigorously to the garments for a few energetic moments. His companions watched this operation with considerable interest. Even Constable Ross had propped himself up on his elbow, so he could see better.

Mason pretended not to notice their interest. He calmly took down his well-polished and shiny Strathcona boots, inspected them carefully, and then began to rub them with a cloth. But this intriguing procedure proved too much for Ross's quickly rising curiosity. It broke all dams and flowed free and wide.

"Say, Jimmy. What the devil is up now?" he inquired with the easy familiarity of long friendship. "Are you going to Winnipeg or P.A.?" The last initial letters

were the generally adopted abbreviation for the town of Prince Albert.

"Am I going to Winnipeg or P.A.?" mimicked Mason irritably. "Why should I be going to Winnipeg or P.A. or anywhere else for that matter?"

"Well, when you take such loving interest in your best bib and tucker you certainly must be intending to go places and do things, as it were," observed Ross.

"Can't a fellow dress up decently now and then without any particular motive?" demanded Mason truculently. "But if you must know, I intend to take a stroll around town."

"In Strathconas with the thermometer yards below zero?" asked Ross with a sceptical grin. "Too thin, old boy. Absolutely and entirely too thin, and utterly unconvincing."

"I bet you I know where the corporal is going," volunteered Constable Grayson, who was playing a game of solitaire on the table, where he got the most benefit from the one electric bulb which served the room as illumination. "He's going up to the hotel to see Miss Warner. I'm willing to bet my bottom dollar that's where he's bound."

Mason turned a look of withering disdain towards the speaker. He hoped he was too far away from the light for the others to notice the guilty flush which he felt creeping into his cheeks when Grayson fired this bulls-eye, but he feared he was not.

"Listen, Grayson," he said with parental sternness. "Little boys should be seen, and not heard."

"One point for Corporal Mason, Esquire!" cried Constable Bremner, the constable on duty, from his listening-post near the door. "Mr. Grayson is floundering around dazed, and somewhat groggy. But all joking aside, Corporal, if you're really going up to see Miss Warner, don't you think you'd better take me along? I mean, you've no experience with girls. You lack technique, and won't be able to get yourself across, if you see what I mean. Now, with me at your side as moral support, you might be able to make some sort of show."

"You would be a choice specimen to hold up for Miss Warner's inspection," snapped Mason, glaring at Bremner.

"Without a doubt she would think it was something the cat had left on the mat, and implore me to take it back to the ash-bin where it belongs."

"Point, game, and set to Corporal Mason!" shouted Grayson gleefully. "Laugh that one off, Bremner."

"You go and chase yourself, baby-face," returned Bremner rudely.

"Now, children. No squabbling," chided Mason. "But just to set your indecently inquiring minds at rest, I'll confess that I am going up to see Miss Warner, on orders from the Inspector. Miss Warner's father started out from here, and the Inspector told me to find out all about his movements while in town, and which direction he had taken when he left, and so on, so forth. And he told me to go up and report the results of my sleuthing to Miss Warner. That's the whole mystery. Now, ain't you guys thrilled?" he jabbed sarcastically.

"And to deliver this report our esteemed and doughty Mr. Mason needs must array himself in his best tunic, his most balloony breeks, and Strathconas complete with spurs, when it's about a hundred or so below outside, and all thinking citizens wearing moccasins. Quite natural and proper, says I," observed Constable Ross to the ceiling. He had again dropped back to the prone position.

The corporal let that one go by. He had begun the process of changing his uniform, and was too much absorbed in this important task to find further time for trifling. When he had finished dressing, he folded his discarded uniform neatly together, and put it up on the shelf.

"Now, you chaps. Try to behave while I'm away," he admonished when he at last stood ready to depart. "Although I'm sorely afraid that this injunction will be merely wasted breath. And see that nobody comes along and kidnaps Grayson on us. Oh, by the way," he continued sweetly, when Grayson lifted his head from the cards to give him a nasty look, "you're the orderly this week, Grayson, aren't you?"

"I am," snapped Grayson. "And I'm not given much time to forget it either around this outfit."

"Well, I don't want to appear fussy and that sort of thing," continued Mason with a grin. "But I should

like to point out to you that there are a couple of offices, and a few other nooks around this palatial building that need sweeping out."

"Oh, I know, I know. So you don't need to rub it in," complained Grayson with the air of an early martyr. "Since I've joined the Police I've certainly picked up enough useful wrinkles to qualify me for a groom or house-boy any day."

"Then your education has not been wasted," suggested Mason with an encouraging smile. "Keep up the good work, and try to perfect yourself. Always try to be perfect in whatever task you take up, be it ever so humble and lowly, is my invariable advice to young people. Well, so-long, chaps." And he disappeared through the open doorway, leaving Grayson muttering things under his breath which had certainly not been included in the curriculum during his training down at Regina.

As soon as Mason had stepped out from the Barracks, he strode rapidly up the street towards the hotel. It was full night around him, though the hour was comparatively early. It was not yet quite six o'clock; but night comes early in the North. The single electric bulbs, which were placed on poles at intervals along the thoroughfare, cast a yellowish circle of light in their immediate neighbourhood. For the rest the street was in semi-darkness, except for the dim light which streamed out of the windows of various dwellings strung along each side of the street at irregular intervals.

Overhead sparkled a myriad of intensely bright stars, while on the northern horizon an Aurora Borealis sent shimmering, scintillating streamers of multicoloured lights towards the zenith at intervals, wiping out the stars they struck in their path.

The little town was very quiet. The stillness was only broken by the occasional tinkle of sleigh-bells, the quicker, jerkier tinkle of the small bells on dog-harness, periodical shouts from dog-drivers, and occasional other human voices, which floated down on the cold, clear air from the more trafficked region around Main Street, which was one block to the north.

When Mason entered the "rotunda" of the hotel, the

atmosphere felt oppressively hot and close in contrast to the crisp, pure air outside. The wooden arm-chairs, standing backed against the walls at close intervals, were well patronized. A few "city-clad" individuals, mostly drummers, and a contingent of men dressed in the rough garb of the trail formed the patrons.

And in the midst of this highly uninteresting collection of males, from Mason's point of view, sat Miss Warner, as a lone representative of the opposite sex. But although her presence there seemed somewhat incongruous, she nevertheless appeared quite at ease and unembarrassed. In the chair next to hers sat one of the "city gents", who seemed to have scraped up a sort of conversational acquaintance with her. At least, he seemed to be doing quite a lot of talking, while she appeared to listen with more politeness than enthusiasm.

As soon as she saw the corporal, she smiled at him, got out of her chair, and walked over to him after a very brief and casual excuse to her previous entertainer. The latter felt hurt. He had always prided himself on "having a way with the ladies", and the casual, even indifferent, way in which he had been thrown into the discard stung him considerably. He felt humiliated and abused. And most unreasonably, though not quite illogically, he began to mutter rude and nasty things to himself about "Mounties" in general, and the immediate cause of his discomfiture in particular.

Wholly unaware of the injured soul she had left in her wake, Miss Warner held out her hand to Mason.

"Good evening, Corporal. I'm so glad you were able to come along. Did you find out anything about father?"

"Not so very much," admitted Mason. "But I had a talk with Inspector Weston just before I came over here, and he has a pretty fair idea about where your father is." He omitted to say that the Inspector's idea covered a lot of territory.

"Oh, that's splendid. But how did the Inspector find this out? It certainly couldn't be from what I told him."

"Oh, yes. Your information helped him a lot," said Mason with a smile. "But let us sit down somewhere,

and I'll tell you what we have found out so far." He looked around the room. "There are a few unoccupied chairs over at the other end of the room. We can talk there without having any listeners."

They walked over to the chairs indicated by Mason and sat down.

He at once started to tell her the information he had picked up around the town about her father's movements, and he also explained the conclusions the Inspector had drawn from that information and the data she had supplied. He did not actually disclose how vague and uncertain Weston's theories really were. For her benefit he endeavoured to strike an optimistic note.

He spoke in a guarded voice. He knew that many ears in the lobby were strained in their direction, and he found it quite unnecessary for any listener to hear what he had to say. He even found it essential to have his head bent rather closely towards Miss Warner. She listened attentively to what he had to say, and their attitude had such an appearance of close intimacy that Miss Warner's late would-be cavalier was almost bursting with hurt vanity.

"But this is splendid," exclaimed Miss Warner, when Mason had finished his story. "It's really marvellous that you could find out such a lot in such a short time. I feel much easier in my mind now. I feel quite confident now that you'll be able to find out what has happened to my father."

"At least we'll do our best, Miss Warner. But I really hope that you'll find your father safe and sound at home when you return. Or at least, that he will return soon."

"I hope so; but . . ." She broke off and stared gravely ahead of her, as if she was looking at something only dimly seen, far off in space. After a few moments she again turned to Mason. "You know," she said, "I can't rid myself of the feeling that something very serious has happened to Dad, however much I try. I may be foolish, of course, but there it is."

"I quite understand your anxiety under the circumstances," said Mason. "But I really wouldn't dwell too much on it. Brooding only seems to magnify anxiety past

the point of actual reason. You know, I feel certain that by the time I get up to Beaver Narrows, I shall have picked up so much information about your father's probable destination that I shall about be able to make a bee-line for his camp," he volunteered, with a bright optimism which was not quite genuine. "That is, of course, if I don't hear that he has returned home before."

"At least, I'm very grateful indeed to Inspector Weston and you for all your kindness, and for the keen interest you have taken in my problem. I shall never be able to thank you enough," she said warmly.

"Please don't mention a word about gratitude, Miss Warner. It's not at all necessary. We are only too pleased to be of some slight service to you." He spoke rather mechanically, and absently. Just now his mind was occupied with a problem of his own. He had decided on his way over to the hotel to make a suggestion to Miss Warner, but now when the moment had arrived he didn't quite know if he dared. Besides she might think him forward.

But suddenly he took a rash and valiant decision.

"Listen, Miss Warner. Have you had your supper yet?" he asked.

"No, not yet. I seldom have supper before seven," she answered. "Why?"

"Well, you see, I happen to know from past personal experience that the cooking at this hotel is not all it should be. And as we have got a Chinese restaurant in town, where they serve really decent meals, I wondered if I could persuade you to have supper with me there." He looked at her a little diffidently, afraid that he might have overstepped the strict barriers of convention. But he need not have worried, as it happened.

"That's very kind of you," she said, to Mason's great relief and gratification. "I should like to very much. To tell you the truth, I wasn't looking forward with any great enthusiasm to the supper here, after having tried their dinner," she confessed with a laugh.

"That's settled, then," said Mason, trying to hide his elation behind a mask of natural ease. "We'll go down any time you feel like a bite."

"I'm really quite ready now," she said. "Your talk about good meals has made me hungry," she smiled. She happened to be looking across the room towards the front door. A man had just entered who was looking around the room.

"Isn't that Inspector Weston over by the door?" she asked.

Mason looked.

"By Jove! So it is. I wonder whom he's looking for."

He wasn't left long to wonder. As soon as the Inspector's roving eyes fell on the two he smiled, and started across the room towards them. Mason jumped to his feet and saluted.

"Good evening, Miss Warner. Good evening, Corporal," greeted Weston. "I have some business to discuss with you, Miss Warner," he explained with a smile. "In fact, I'm here as a sort of envoy or ambassador, as it were. As soon as my wife heard that there was a young lady in town who was a stranger in our midst, she immediately ordered me to find you, and bring you over to our house for supper. Now you mustn't disappoint my wife, Miss Warner. You really mustn't."

"It is very nice and kind of Mrs. Weston to ask me, and I appreciate it very much indeed, but Corporal Mason has already asked me to have supper with him," she answered.

"Down at Ah Wing's, of course," laughed Weston. "Much as I appreciate Ah Wing's culinary art, and I speak from long experience in the past, I really think you'll be more comfortable with us. Of course, Corporal Mason is included in the invitation," he added, when he noticed her embarrassment.

"What do you say, Corporal?" she asked, turning to him.

"I should absolutely advise you to accept Mrs. Weston's hospitality," answered Mason promptly.

"And that settles that," commented Weston cheerfully. "Please get your hat and coat, Miss Warner, and we'll go right over to the house. I'm sure you'll be considerably more comfortable there than here," he added with

a grin, indicating their unattractive and unlovely surroundings.

"I'm sure I shall," she smiled. "It is really too kind of Mrs. Weston to bother about a perfect stranger. Are you sure I won't be a lot of bother to her?"

"Far from it. It will be a pleasure," answered Weston. "I might as well confess to you that you are really bestowing an immense favour on my wife in coming," he continued with a chuckle. "She often complains that she so seldom sees any new faces around here. And she contends that she knows all the ladies in town so well that she knows what they are going to say before they open their mouths. They have swapped yarns and gossip for so long now, so all their subjects of conversation have long ago been worn quite threadbare. So any new-comer is always hailed with glee. My wife really considers you a sort of godsend."

Miss Warner laughed.

"I'm sure you are saying this just to make me feel more comfortable, Mr. Weston," she said. "It is very kind of Mrs. Weston and you to be so hospitable towards a total stranger, and I appreciate it very much indeed. Excuse me a moment, and I'll run up to my room and get my things."

When she had gone Weston turned to the corporal.

"I suppose you told her what you had found out about her father's movements so far?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. That's what I came up here for. I also told her that you had figured out her father's probable destination, sir. But I'm afraid I gave her the impression that your idea about the locality was more definite than it really is. I thought it would help to make her feel more easy in her mind. Hope you don't mind, sir."

"Not at all. You did quite right. Did she seem to take a brighter view of things after that?"

"Well, I don't know, sir," answered Mason dubiously. "She told me she felt easier in her mind, but almost immediately after she said she couldn't rid her mind of the feeling that something very serious had happened to her father."

"I sincerely hope her feeling is wrong," said Weston

gravely. "Her father is a very decent chap. Quiet, steady, and kind-hearted. I used to know him rather well in the old days. Ran into him here and there on the trail, and in gold-camps. I should hate to think that anything had happened to him. The daughter takes after him. Nice, sensible girl. It would be a great pity if her intuition should prove to be right. And it's really remarkable how often a woman's intuition really proves to be right. Funny thing, the human mind," he mused aloud.

A few minutes later Miss Warner joined them, and they all set out for Weston's house.

Miss Warner enjoyed the walk in the fresh, cold air after the close atmosphere of the hotel. But she felt a little nervous at the thought that she was to be the guest of a woman whom she had never seen, and of whom she knew nothing. She couldn't help wondering with some trepidation what Mrs. Weston was like.

But her nervousness and trepidation disappeared completely as soon as she arrived at their destination. Betty Weston received her with the spontaneous cordiality of an old friend, and made her feel at home from the start. In fact, as the evening progressed she began to feel as if she were among friends of long standing. They all seemed to compete with each other to make her feel comfortable. Even Richard junior, Westons' only child, a sturdy lad of about four, who had at first submitted her to that searching, critical scrutiny of children, which often proves so embarrassing to their elders, finally admitted her to his circle of friends. The whole situation seemed almost unreal to her. Only that morning she had stepped off the train in a perfectly strange town where she didn't know a soul, afraid of a somewhat cold reception by the police authorities; and here she was, only a few hours later, surrounded by friendly people who were vying with each other to entertain her, and with her problem transferred into the capable hands of the Police. No wonder that her heart warmed to them all.

After an excellent supper Weston entertained them by recounting some of his experiences from his long service in the Police. All were light and humorous stories, which

kept them amused. Weston made it a point to keep the grim, dangerous, or sordid cases he had dealt with strictly to himself. He couldn't see any sense in trying to entertain people if you couldn't amuse them." Life was murky and sordid enough as it was, he often observed, without adding to the general gloom by recounting dark, dismal tales.

Into this genial, pleasant atmosphere the telephone suddenly jangled sharply, shortly after nine o'clock.

Mrs. Weston went over to the instrument, and picked up the receiver.

"It's for you, Dick," she called to her husband. "Constable Bremner wants to speak to you."

"Some trouble, most likely," observed Weston with a grimace, as he got out of his chair, and walked over to the telephone.

"Yes, Bremner?" he spoke into the transmitter.

Constable Bremner evidently had a lengthy message to deliver, to which Weston listened intently.

"All right," he said at last. "Keep the men there. I'll be right over." He rang off.

"I'm afraid Mason and I shall have to leave you ladies for a while," he announced. "Two fellows have just arrived at the Barracks from Beaver Narrows with a story about some slight trouble up there. So the corporal and I must go over and hear what it's all about. We shan't be long."

The two men were soon rapidly striding towards the Barracks.

"Anything serious, sir?" ventured Mason.

"Rather nasty. A white trapper up there seems to have gone stark crazy. They think he's killed his partner, and he also apparently has threatened the rest of the people up there with extinction."

"Doesn't sound very pleasant, sir."

"Sounds deuced unpleasant, I should say," murmured Weston.

CHAPTER IV

INSPECTOR WESTON was right. It was a "deuced unpleasant" affair they found out when they arrived at the Barracks. Outside a dog-sleigh, with seven dogs in the harness, was drawn up. The dogs were all lying down, panting heavily, and looking very tired and weary. The sleigh contained only two bed-rolls, a grub-box, and some fish for dog-feed. The light load, and the exhausted appearance of the dogs, proved that speed had been the chief consideration of the drivers.

Inside in the outer office they found a half-breed and an Indian, who showed the same unmistakable traces of a hard, fast journey, as had the dogs. They were sitting on the form, their backs propped up against the wall behind them, in a posture of complete relaxation. The half-breed gave only somnolent, monosyllabic answers to Constable Bremner's attempts at conversation, while the Indian was frankly nodding where he sat.

They all got to their feet when the Inspector entered, followed by Mason. Although Bremner stood faultlessly "to attention" he could not prevent his eyes from flickering their surprise at the appearance of Mason with the Inspector. Always a lad who wanted to get to the bottom of any mystery, his busy mind at once began to probe into the intriguing question as to how the Inspector had happened to produce the corporal with such astounding promptitude.

Weston greeted the two men from Beaver Narrows warmly. He knew them both well from former journeys up to their settlement. They were both in the employ of the Hudson's Bay Company's trading-post up there. When he questioned them about their journey down, and was told that they had averaged almost forty miles per

day his enthusiastic praise called forth smiles on their tired, drawn faces.

As soon as the greetings were over the Inspector led the way into the inner office, followed by the two men and Mason.

Here the half-breed, Baptiste Dubois, handed Weston a letter from the latter's old friend Bill Jennings, the manager of the Hudson's Bay Company's post at Beaver Narrows, whereupon Baptiste and his companion again relaxed in their chairs, and looked half asleep.

The Inspector eagerly opened the letter from Jennings. Jennings was a very old and dear friend of his. He was a bachelor, who had been in charge of the trading-post up at Beaver Lake for somewhere around fifteen years. He used to say of himself: "Gosh! I'm no longer a mere manager of a trading-post, I'm an institution up here. This country would go to pot in no time if I ever left. The folk would feel as if they had lost their main prop, guide, philosopher, and friend. So I simply have to stick." However that was, Jennings had several times declined to accept trading-posts farther south which had been offered to him. He claimed he was quite satisfied to remain where he was, and did not feel like moving till he was old and decrepit, which he hoped would be a long time hence.

Weston read Jennings' letter with knitted brows. It was rather lengthy, and that in itself was proof of serious trouble, as Bill Jennings cordially hated writing letters, and invariably made them as short as possible, and often even shorter.

"DEAR WESS," ran the letter, "A bit of hell has popped up here. Jim Wilson, a white trapper, is the popper. Used to be a decent old fellow, but now he seems to have gone suddenly bug-house. It looks as if he has killed his partner, George Brent. They have been trapping up here for the last two seasons and seemed to be old, firm pals.

"The first indication I had of any trouble was from a half-breed moose-hunter a few days ago. Following the tracks of a moose, he happened to cross one of Wilson's

trap-lines just as the owner himself came along. Without any warning Wilson screamed to the hunter to get out of his sight, and as the fellow only stood and gaped at the trapper, amazed at this reception, Wilson up with his rifle, which he was carrying in his hand. The hunter moved fast then, and was hidden behind a spruce almost as soon as the shot came. Luckily Wilson scored a clean miss. 'Hey! What you doin'?' yelled the hunted hunter, or something like that. 'You son of Belial, I'll get you yet!' bellowed Wilson, coming for the fellow. 'I've killed one man already for mocking our Maker, and I'll kill you too. All sinners must die, our Lord says!' Well the breed didn't wait to hear any more, but legged it into the bush as fast as his snow-shoes would take him, ducking and twisting through the heaviest cover he could find. He could move much faster than Wilson, who's a rather heavy, slow-moving plodder, so he soon lost him. Luckily that hunter had enough sense to understand that poor Wilson was raving mad, or else he might have unlimbered his own artillery and shot him right there and then. Well, the breed lost all interest in the moose, and hot-footed it back here to tell me all about it.

"As soon as I heard the story I sent Baptiste Dubois up to Wilson's camp to investigate. Baptiste, as you know, is pretty level-headed, and has got plenty of sense. When he got up to the camp Wilson was in his cabin, but he gave Baptiste one hell of a reception. But Baptiste himself will tell you all about that, as I'm sending him down with this letter."

Here Weston grinned broadly. He could almost hear the sigh of relief with which Jennings had pushed the burden of explaining along to Baptiste. He believed in employing any means to further epistolary brevity.

"As you'll gather from Baptiste," continued the letter, "Wilson has in all probability killed his partner. And you'll also gather that friend Wilson seems to have homicidal intents and purposes for us all up here. So get a hustle on, and get some of your warriors up here to gather him in before he kills somebody, or gets killed himself, or both."

"How's Betty and Junior? Fine, I hope. I'm sending down by Baptiste some fancy embroidered moccasins for them, and a bit of fur for Betty. When am I going to see you up here again, old sourdough? Anyhow, I'll be down next summer, and am looking forward to seeing you all then. Yours aye, BILL."

When Weston had finished the letter he handed it to Mason.

"Read that," he said. "And when you've finished, we'll hear what Baptiste has to tell us."

"Huh?" grunted Baptiste, who heard his name mentioned, opened sleep-laden eyes, and looked owlishly at Weston.

"Just a minute, old-timer," smiled Weston. "I'm going to ask you a few questions by and by."

"Good," mumbled Baptiste, and returned to his semi-somnolent state.

When Mason had read the letter he handed it back to the Inspector.

"Doesn't sound very good, sir," he volunteered.

"No. It doesn't sound good at all," agreed Weston.

"Looks like another poor devil whom the North has got. Now, Baptiste, I have to ask you to tell me a few things. I don't like to bother you when you are as tired as you are," he continued kindly. "But this matter seems to be a rush job."

"Gosh! Me not very tired. Gosh, no! What's little trip lak' dat to me?" protested Baptiste, straightening up.

As it happened, Weston could speak Baptiste's own language, the Cree tongue, considerably better than Baptiste could speak English. But Baptiste, who could speak both English and French tolerably well, was very proud of this achievement. And like all other half-breeds and Indians who could boast the same accomplishment, he simply loved to show off his linguistic prowess when opportunity offered. And as Weston was well aware of this fact, he addressed him in English.

"Right, Baptiste," he said with a smile. "Bill Jennings tells me in this letter that a trapper up in your district called Wilson shot at a hunter without reason or

explanation. When he heard about the shooting he sent you out to Wilson's camp to investigate."

"Dat's right," agreed Baptiste.

"Now tell me what happened up at Wilson's camp."

"Well, lak' you say Bill ask me go up an' have look-see, after hunter comes in an' tells Wilson shoot at him. An' Wilson also shout, hunter say: 'I kill one man already for bein' sinner', or somethin' lak' dat. So Bill say perhaps Wilson has murder' George Brent. Dem two partners. He tells me to fin' Brent, or fin' out what happen' to him when I go up. So I go. Ten miles up on east side Beaver Lake is Wilson's camp. In among hills. Fine trappin' grounds. When I get there I scout aroun' some first. Don't lak' Wilson shoot me. From a hill I see Wilson is home. Smoke comin' out stove-pipe in shack. 'Fine,' says I to myself. Then I go nose aroun' nearer shack. I circle aroun' an' got to trail leadin' to trap-line. I take good look, an' only fin' fresh tracks o' one pair snow-shoes. 'One set o' tracks, one man,' says I to myself. 'Guess George Brent gone for good.' But to mak' sure I circle all the way aroun' camp to see if tracks lead out o' camp any place else, but no more tracks. So Brent mus' be in camp, I figger, dead or alive. Dead, mos' likely. Dan I guessed it time to go an' say how-dy to Wilson. I creep up to clearin' where shack is dam' careful. Hoped I could sneak up to window an' have look inside before Wilson know me there. But no good. Dogs was chained where dey spot me at once, an' dogs would bark an' give me away. So instead I half hide behin' big tree in front o' door with rifle ready. Dan I shout: 'Hey, Brent!' And at once dogs begin to bark, an' make hell o' noise. Up goes door, an' out comes Wilson with rifle up. I sen' quick shot into wall beside him an' shout: 'Stay quiet, or I keel you!' Luckily dat mak' him stan'. Good bluff. I not goin' keel poor loon," he explained with a grin. "If he had come at me, I was goin' to shoot heem in leg first to stop heem, an' then in arm so heem not able to use gun, an' then I tak' heem along tied. But he stop where he stan's. 'Who are you, you son of Satan!' he howls, his face black lak' thunder. 'Where's George Brent? Me want

“speak to heem,” I holler back. “Brent is burnin’ in hell for his sins!” shouts Wilson, a funny look come into his face. His eyes was funny. Shinin’ an’ snappin’ like a trapped lynx. I got creepy feelin’ lookin’ at heem. “George Brent was sinner from hell, so I sen’ heem back!” he shout. “I beg heem men’ his ways. I plead with heem. I pray for heem. No use. He worse an’ worse an’ mock his Maker.” An’ den Wilson start shoutin’ how bad an’ sinful George bin. I not unnerstan’ half. Heem use such big words. Like heem was readin’ Bible, or preachin’ from pulpit. An’ he gets more an’ more work up as he shout about George’s sins. An’ dem sins seem to be plenty. Guess Satan never sin more’n George, the way Wilson shoot his mouth off. An’ at last heem shout: “. . . an’ as he wouldn’t take heed an’ men’ his wicked ways, an’ had become an ab—ab—somethin’ in the eyes o’ the Lord——”

“Abomination?” suggested Weston.

“Dat’s the word. Just the word. I tried to remember, but forgot. Well, heem shout George was ab—ab—well, what you said, in the eyes o’ the Lord, ‘an’ so I sen’ heem to hell where he belongs!’ An’ he screams dem last words lak’ a wil’ beast, an’ spit is runnin’ from his mouth, an’ his eyes was just like burnin’ coals. I was ‘most scared stiff lookin’ at heem. Heem look so fierce an’ wild. He look as if heem goin’ rush me, but I have enough wits left to sen’ another quick bullet into wall near heem, an’ dat steadies heem. ‘Stay where you are!’ I shout, ‘or I sen’ you to join George in hell!’ An’ he stood still an’ lost some o’ his funny look. He looked less loony, I mean. ‘Where’s George’s body?’ I shout quick. ‘Come an’ see!’ he yells back with a sorta grin. Well, I couldn’t go an’ see, so I shout: ‘You keep heem in shack?’ He not answer dat, but begin to look queer again. An’ by den I quit worryin’ much about George’s body. I was beginnin’ to feel creepy an’ spooky all over, an’ wanted to get away quick. But I didn’t want heem shoot me in back when I went. So I shouted to heem: ‘You go back into shack an’ close door, or I shoot you where you stan’!’ He up an’ shouted back: ‘Who are you to threaten me, you son o’ Satan?’

You are all sinners aroun' here, an' when the time is ripe, I'm goin' to purge the earth o' you! ' That 'most make me laugh. Last time doctor was at the Narrows my wife not feelin' so well. An' doctor tell her she need a purge. I asked heem what the word means, an' he explains. An' after, I remember that word. So it sounded to me as if Wilson inten' to go 'roun' an' give us all physics. An' that sounded funny to me. But after I got back, an' Bill explained what Wilson mean, it didn't soun' funny no more. Well, I shout again I shoot to kill if he didn't go into shack quick. He stood a secon' or two, lookin' over to where I was hid, as if wonderin' how he could get me. But then he suddenly turn, go into shack, an' slam door behin' heem. Den I turned an' beat it for the thick bush, fast as I could go, an' headed back to my dog-team, which I'd left a mile or so away. I sure felt funny an' shaky. But when I got to the dogs I felt all right again. Then I suddenly think, perhaps he follow on my trail all the way to Narrows, an' perhaps start killin' people. He look crazy enough to be primed for anything. So I wait to see if he come along, so I could stop heem. An' I didn't feel so good waitin' there either for this crazy loon, but he didn't come. An' I waited 'most a coupla hours too. So I started my dogs an' beat it back to Bill. I tole heem what I see an' hear. I also tole heem I was willin' to get out an' get Wilson on his trap-line, shootin' heem in leg an' arm, lak' I tole before, an' tyin' heem up, an' then we would have heem safe. But Bill says that no good, an' against the law. So he tells me to hustle down here as fast as I can go with dat letter for you. So I get Big Muskrat Joe there, an' here we are," he ended with a grin.

Big Muskrat Joe had not taken the slightest interest in the recital. He had been shamelessly nodding in his chair. His job was done when they arrived at the Barracks.

"A queer story," observed Weston. "And you told it well, Baptiste. I hear your English is as good as ever," he added with a smile, which made Baptiste beam with pride. "Now, I have to ask you a few more questions before I let you off. What sort of man was that Wilson before he went mad?"

" Always seem to be very decent fellow before. Heem an' Brent trappin' up there two seasons before this. Wilson always quiet sort o' fellow. Never speak much, never smile much. Seems to like keep to himself. But he always frien'ly. He'n Brent always seem get on fine together. But when dey get up dis season Wilson seem different. Not so frien'ly. Frownin' a lot. Sounded short an' snappy an' always findin' fault with Brent an' ev'rybody. Always carry Bible aroun' in pocket an' read it plenty. An' if he hear people say innocent dam' or such, he up an' speak to him lak' parson on Sunday. He not seem same man at all."

" I see," remarked Weston thoughtfully. " And what sort of fellow was this man George Brent? "

" Fine fellow. Big an' jolly. Always cheerful, an' frien' with all. Used to come in to Narrows a lot, when he had chance. Liked comp'ny an' funnin' with people."

" I see," repeated Weston. For a while he remained silent, looking into space. He had the background of the tragedy now. Apparently Wilson was the reserved, introspective type of man, given to broodings and speculations on religious matters. And his religion was evidently of the brand which discards the message of joy and cheer in the Gospel, and considers it essential for humanity to shroud itself in gloom and joylessness during its earthly pilgrimage in order to gain eternal blessing and happiness hereafter. And gradually these morbid speculations had increased to such a pitch of intensity that they had begun to assume the proportion of a mania, which step by step would carry the mind towards the borderland of insanity. Evidently Wilson's mind had reached this stage when he returned to Beaver Narrows for the present trapping season. The obvious change in him proved that. And then the North had done the rest. The deep, silent, sombre forest all around, and he and Brent alone in their camp. Wilson brooding, brooding, his morbid speculations getting firmer and firmer hold, beginning to overshadow every other thought and consideration, commencing to spread like a blanket of fog over his reason, gradually obscuring it. Brent cheerful, jolly, probably trying to shake his partner out of his slough of despondency and morbid

melancholia by a jovial front, and only succeeding in jarring more and more on his partner's nerves, already badly frayed by his futile and gloomy reflections. Then at last something had suddenly snapped inside Wilson's mind, and he had crashed into the dark hinterland of insanity. And then tragedy had followed. Not an unusual story to come out of the Northland, which often tests men's nerves to the breaking-point, and past. . . .

Weston came out of his reverie, and again turned to Baptiste.

"Well, I'll let you and Big Muskrat Joe go now, to get the rest you richly deserve," he said with a smile. "We have heard all we want to know, I think. Corporal Mason will start up to-morrow morning, and he'll take care of Wilson. I only hope he gets there before there are more tragedies. But I think Wilson will stay quiet if nobody gets near him to get him excited."

"No fear o' nobody goin' near heem," remarked Baptiste with a grin. "People up there so dam' scared o' heem, they not go near his camp by miles. You bet."

"That's good. I suppose you intend to stay in town for a few days to rest up?"

"We figgered stay a few days to take in movie-show or two," confessed Baptiste. "But if you want me go along o' corporal, me go."

"No. No necessity for you to go along. You rest yourself and your dogs, and have a good time. We'll take care of this case from now on."

"Well, guess we go along then," said Baptiste, getting stiffly up. "Hey! You come along," he told the nodding Big Muskrat Joe, and gave him a shake.

The Indian opened his eyes, looked up, took in the situation correctly, grunted, and heaved himself groggily out of his chair.

"Well. Good night. And thank you again for bringing us word so quickly," said Weston.

"G'night, Inspector," answered Baptiste, while his companion grunted the Cree equivalent. They had got to the door when Baptiste suddenly stopped and turned.

"Gosh! I near forgot, Inspector. I've got parcel on sleigh for the Missus from Bill," he cried.

"Don't bother about that now," said Weston. "Bring it over to my wife yourself to-morrow when you've had a rest. You used to be great pals when she was up at Beaver Narrows, so she'll like to see you."

"You bet we was great pals," boasted Baptiste with a broad grin. "Betty was great girl. She used come over visit with my Missus often, an' fool aroun' with kids, when she used to stay with Gunns. An' her sister, Missus Gunn, one fine woman too. An' Allan Gunn ver' good fellow, though he did belong to French Company." Baptiste spoke deprecatingly, as if he was referring to an otherwise decent and respectable person, who had fallen into questionable company. Gunn had for years been the manager of the Revillion Freres Trading Company's post up at Beaver Narrows, and Baptiste was a strong pro-Hudson's Bay man. Hence his deprecation.

"Well, we'll see you at the house to-morrow, then, Baptiste," smiled Weston. "Good night, and sleep well."

"G'night, Inspector," repeated Baptiste, and disappeared down the corridor, where Big Muskrat Joe had already preceded him.

"And that's that," commented Weston, looking at Mason. "Another job for you. Two in one day. One week less of the flesh-pots of civilization for you, my lad. You'll have to pull out early to-morrow morning."

"Yessir."

"And as soon as you have secured that madman, you'll have to push the inquiries about Warner. The more I think of it, the more positive I am that he was headed for that region. You'd better take Constable Grayson with you. It will be a good opportunity to break him in for the trail. And he can bring that man Wilson back here. That'll leave you free to start that other investigation."

"Yessir. But isn't it a bit risky to have Grayson take that man down? He's rather green yet, sir, and the madman may prove troublesome."

"Yes. But of course Alec Chaboye will be along to give him a hand. Alec isn't overburdened with brains, but he's a stout, reliable fellow, who knows the ropes well. So between them they should be able to manage

nically." Alec Chaboye was the official guide attached to the Police.

"Oh, if Alec comes along Grayson will be quite all right, sir," agreed the corporal. "Of course we'll take two dog-teams? "

"Oh, quite. One for you, and one for the others. Of course Grayson and Alec will have to take down Wilson's dog-team, too, with the poor fellow's fur and other stuff, and the body of his partner—if there really is a body. On the way up you'll have plenty of opportunity of initiating Grayson into the fine points of mushing the winter-trails. He seems a rather bright lad, on the whole."

"Quite, sir. I rather like the youngster. Seems to have lots of sand and spunk in spite of his youthful appearance. He was just grumbling to me to-day up at the depot at the lack of excitement around here," confided Mason with a grin. "And that seems to indicate he's got the right spirit."

"It does," laughed Weston. "Well, I think he'll find plenty of excitement on this trip, if I'm not much mistaken. You'd better go along and break the good news to him. I'll wait for you here. And then we'll go back home."

"Don't you think I'd better stay and start making my preparations for to-morrow's trip, sir?" asked Mason doubtfully and very fearfully, praying to Heaven that the Inspector would not pin him to his rash suggestion.

"Nothing much you can do to-night that Grayson can't attend to. And I don't dare rob Miss Warner of her escort, you know," observed Weston with a smile.

"Very well, sir. I won't be a minute." And Mason hurried out of the office, breathing a deep sigh of relief.

He found Grayson in the barrack-room, and told him what was in store for him. The youngster was jubilant, and promised to execute the hurried instructions the corporal gave him promptly, speedily, and thoroughly. One of the instructions was to get hold of Alec Chaboye at once, and to tell him to be at the Barracks the following morning at six o'clock, sharp. Mason wanted everything to be packed and ready early, so they could start around daybreak. And the enthusiastic Grayson immediately scurried off to find Alec Chaboye.

CHAPTER V

"I'm ready, sir," announced Mason when he returned to the Inspector's office.

"Good. Then we'll get going. The ladies will think we have run out on them by now. And not a word about the details of this business, remember. It would only upset Miss Warner, and bring her own problem forcibly in front of her in a new, ugly light. We'll just tell them you're leaving for Beaver Narrows to-morrow morning to bring down a trapper who's suspected of going crazy."

"Very well, sir."

When they arrived back at Weston's home they found that the ladies were entertaining a visitor. In the room with them sat a smallish, swarthy man with unmistakable Indian features. But if anyone should have suggested to his face that he must be an Indian, he would have been promptly corrected, and in no uncertain terms. For the man happened to be a half-breed. His name was Angus Mackenzie, and he was inordinately proud of the thin trickle of Scotch blood that ran in his veins. In fact, he himself considered the trickle a wide, broad stream.

Angus was Weston's trusted friend and guide of long standing. They had first met years before when Weston had come to Portage Bend as a corporal. And together they had roamed the North, and had been companions on the winter-trails and the summer-trails, and had shared many strange and stirring adventures between them. During the days when Weston was a corporal, and later a sergeant, they had been almost inseparable. Weston used to call Angus his Chief-Of-Staff. Angus was utterly trustworthy, absolutely fearless, possessed a high intelli-

gence, and knew all there was to know about woodcraft, and how to meet the various exigencies of the trails of the North.

When Weston was promoted to Inspector, and then married, Angus also decided to become domesticated. He started a small store across the river near the Indian Reserve, and shortly afterwards he also married. The store prospered, and when his wife a year or so later made him the proud father of twins, a boy and a girl, Angus's happiness was complete. In due course the boy was given the baptismal names Richard Weston Mackenzie, and the girl was called Betty Weston Mackenzie, in honour of his friends the Westons. But little over a year ago tragedy had overtaken the family. An epidemic of spinal meningitis had broken out amongst the children on the Reserve. Doctors were rushed up from the South to deal with the dread disease, and they finally succeeded in checking it. But not before there had been many fatalities among the children. And among those who succumbed were Angus's boy and girl. The shock of this double tragedy had proved too much for his wife. A hitherto unsuspected heart trouble had been severely aggravated. Weston summoned post-haste from Winnipeg an eminent heart specialist; but in spite of his unsparing efforts to save her life, she died three months after her little children had been buried. It seemed that she had lost all stamina and desire to live.

To the world in general Angus had presented a stoical calm during these tragedies which followed one another so quickly. Only Westons knew the full extent of his terrible grief and suffering. Only to them did he open his heart, and they alone knew the crushing agony hidden behind that stoical front he considered it incumbent on his manhood to present to the world. But in spite of his gruelling self-control he could not prevent the deep lines which became permanently etched on his face, nor the grey streaks which began to appear in his hair.

Westons did all they could to alleviate Angus's suffering. They encouraged him to visit them as often as he could, and they paid frequent visits to him at his now lonely, bereft home over across the river. Angus appreci-

ated deeply the spontaneous, unobtrusive kindness and sympathy of these his old friends, and gradually he became, outwardly at least, more like his old self.

"Hello, Wess. Hello, Mason," greeted Angus, when the two men entered the room. He still always called Weston by his nickname from his earlier days in the Police, regardless of his present dignified position.

"Hello, Angus, my boy!" cried Weston, shaking Angus's hand heartily. "Glad to see you. It's over a week since we saw you last, so we were beginning to wonder what had happened to you. Why didn't you come in for supper to-night, when you were over anyway?"

"Didn't get over till after supper," explained Angus. "Had to see a fellow on bis'ness. But me came straight along as soon as bis'ness finished. An' Betty an' Miss Warner look after me fine while you away," he added with a smile.

"And how is business, Angus?" continued Weston.

"Oh, bis'ness fine. Gettin' better an' better. But I'm beginnin' feelin' restless. Need holiday, I guess. Why don't you quit office for a spell, Wess, an' me'n you take nice trip over trail. Betty won't min'. Must be pretty tired lookin' at you all the time by now," he grinned.

"Well, yes. I suppose it is a bit of a trial to the poor girl," laughed Weston. "But I'm afraid there is no chance for me to leave the office for some time. Somebody must be around and keep an eye on things, and keep the wheels of law and order moving, as it were. As it is I shall be rather short-handed for a spell. Corporal Mason and Constable Grayson are leaving for Beaver Narrows to-morrow morning."

"They both go to Beaver Narrows?" asked Angus, looking up at Weston with keen interest. "What for?"

"Oh, there is a white trapper up there who's been acting up a bit. They suspect he's crazy," explained Weston easily. "And so I'm sending them up there to look into things, and to bring him back out if necessary."

"But why two go?" asked Angus shrewdly.

"Well, you see, Grayson is a new man here, who knows nothing about the North. So I'm sending him along with

Mason to have him broken in," explained Weston. "Besides, the corporal has got some other matters to attend to up around Beaver Narrows. So if it proves necessary to take this man out, Grayson can bring him back, and leave Mason free to look after the other matters."

"Huh!" grunted Angus thoughtfully. "Risky let greenhorn take in madman alone, when he not know much about ways of trail."

"Oh, Alec Chaboye is going along, of course. And between them they should be able to manage."

"Huh! Alec all right," observed Angus. "But not strong on head-fillin's. All right when tole what to do. Not so much use when he has to think out what to do. Tell you what, Wess. I'd better go along with them. I'm just hankerin' for little trip."

"But what about your business, Angus?" asked Weston.

"Oh, bis'ness will be all right. Joe, my brother-in-law, been with me so long now, he knows bis'ness as well as me, almost. An' besides, ain't much doin' just now. Trappers have all bought supplies for season. Nothin' to keep me."

"Well, if you really want to go, there is no reason on earth why you shouldn't," said Weston. He knew this trip would be an excellent tonic for Angus's spirits. The familiar life on the trail would take him out of himself, and would crowd into the background for a while, at least, the sad thoughts Weston knew were always haunting him. "I'll even confess," continued Weston with a smile, "that I shall feel much easier in my mind with you as Grayson's companion on the return trip. And I know Alec won't weep any tears because he misses taking a trip over the winter-trails. He likes domestic comforts, Alec does."

"Sure. I guess Alec will do some joy-whoopin' because he can stay home with wife an' kids," observed Angus, staring with sad wistfulness into space.

"I'm sure he will. I'll 'phone down to the Barracks at once and tell the boys to give Alec the message of joy and cheer," said Weston, going over to the telephone.

"When you aimin' to start, Mason?" asked Angus.

"Around seven to-morrow morning, so we can be well on our way by daybreak."

"Good. Takin' two dog-teams?"

"Yes. One for Grayson and one for me."

"Fine. I'll take my team. That much better than any you got in the Police."

"What's that, Angus? Your team better than any we have got," asked Weston, who had just returned from the telephone, and had happened to overhear Angus's disparaging remark about the police-dogs. "Listen, my boy, I should like to race you up to Beaver Narrows with one of our teams, and I'll bet I'd get there days ahead of you."

"Ha-ha!" sneered Angus. "If you race me you get to Beaver Narrows just the same time I get there. 'Cause about half-way up you an' your team would be all played out, so I would have to load both you an' your team on my sleigh to get you there. That's how you'd get there same time as me."

"The nerve of you!" exclaimed Weston, glaring at Angus, while the others roared with laughter. "If I hadn't been so confoundedly busy, I'd have taken you on. Hec, if I wouldn't!"

"It wouldn't get you nowheres, Wess," taunted Angus. "'Cause you's gettin' too soft. Sittin' all day in office, readin' letters an' writin' letters. An' then you sign letters to Headquarters in P.A. nicely with: 'Your obedient servant', when you feel like knockin' their fool heads off. Sure you's gettin' soft, soft as lard," ended Angus with a provocative and insulting grin.

"One point to Angus," laughed Betty Weston. She always enjoyed hugely these wrangles between the two. The truth was that they both admired each other immensely, and in Angus's case this admiration literally amounted to hero-worship. So these unseemly wrangles were staged purely for amusement and entertainment.

Weston joined in the laugh at his own expense.

"I'll show you some day, Angus, that there is a kick or two left in the old man yet," he chuckled.

"Perhaps. Me wait an' see," grunted Angus, cramming all the scepticism he could into the words.

"No use arguing with you, Angus. You will take away

the last shred of my character," smiled Weston. "By the way, Betty, Baptiste Dubois came down with a letter from Bill Jennings about that little trouble up there. Bill says he's sent along some moccasins for you and Junior, and a bit of fur for you. I told Baptiste to bring them along to-morrow when he's rested after his trip down. I knew you'd like to see him."

"I certainly shall be glad to see my old friend Baptiste. But it's too bad of Bill always to be sending us things. How is he?"

"Fine and fit as usual, I gathered. Anyhow, Baptiste will give you a complete and comprehensive bulletin to-morrow, I expect."

"Poor Bill. It must be lonesome staying up there year after year."

"He seems perfectly happy, so you don't need to 'poor Bill' him," said Weston. "He's refused several times to be shifted down nearer to civilization. Though he does miss Kit, Allan, and Tootles quite a lot, I know." Here Weston explained for Miss Warner's benefit that the three persons referred to were the Gunns and their son and heir. "He confessed to me last summer, that since they left the Revillion Freres have rapidly been going to the dogs. They sent a bachelor up to relieve Allan Gunn as manager of the French post, and Bill claims that now his only chance to get a decent meal is to cook it himself. No more wallowing in the flesh-pots of the French post after Kit left."

"He told me the same thing, and he sounded very pathetic about it, too," smiled Betty Weston. "Only he told me that the only time he had a decent meal now was when he was in here and had his meals with us."

"Hang it all! Bill is more of a diplomat than I ever gave him credit for," remarked Weston with a grin.

"Richard Weston! Do you think that is a polite or nice thing to say?" demanded his wife in mock horror.

"Oh, I didn't mean it that way. What I meant was . . . Hang it all, Angus. What was it I meant?"

"You meant to say, Betty dam' good cook, an' anybody say different is dam' big liar," said Angus with a broad grin.

"Thanks, Angus. Just the very words. You saved the day for me, old boy. Victoria Cross for you. Just write

the King and tell him I said so. Angus always knows what I mean to say. Shouldn't know what to do without old Angus."

"Well, I know what I'm going to do, and that without consulting anybody," said Betty, rising. "I'm going out into the kitchen and make a cup of coffee and some refreshments for all of us."

"Can I help you, Mrs. Weston?" asked Miss Warner, springing up from her chair. "Please let me."

"Certainly, my dear. Come right along. And we'll leave the battle-field to the males."

As soon as the two ladies had disappeared kitchenwards, Angus turned to Weston and the corporal.

"Now tell me all about trouble up at Narrows. Two men don't pull out so quick if nothing very bad up," he said.

Weston quickly gave him an outline of the whole matter.

"Hm. Don't soun' too good," commented Angus when Weston had finished. "Might be difficult gettin' the fellow without hurtin' him some."

"Well, that'll be up to the corporal and you. Between you, I know you'll be able to hit on some scheme of getting him without mussing him up too much."

"We'll sure try. An' what's corporal goin' do up there after we get this mad fellow?"

Weston explained about Miss Warner's father, and also gave his reasons for assuming that the missing man was up somewhere in that part of the country.

"Soun's reasonable," said Angus thoughtfully. "Yessir. Soun's dam' reasonable. Who's this fella Warner?"

"Don't you remember Joe Warner, the prospector? We met him up at Moose Lake, the time they had the gold-rush up there."

"Sure. I remember him good. Fine fellow. So Miss Warner is daughter o' ole Joe? Dam' fine girl. I like her. You can't fin' out who fella was who went with Joe?"

"No. We haven't been able to find out a thing about him."

"Hm," grunted Angus. "I sure wish I could go with Mason, to look for Warner. Perhaps be interesting. But

I guess I've got to go along an' guide Grayson's footsteps."

"Isn't it a pity we can't be two places at the same time, Angus?" smiled Weston. "If we could, I could stay here and look after things, and at the same time I could be along with you to see that you didn't mess things up too badly."

"Mess up things. Huh!" snorted Angus contemptuously. "Me an' Corporal will look after things good an' proper an' ding-dandy. What say, Mason?"

"At least we'll do our best, Angus," smiled Mason.

A little later the two ladies returned and began to spread a feast on the table. And they all did the fullest justice to the sandwiches and cakes Mrs. Weston served with the coffee. Especially so Angus, who observed with a grin:

"Better stuff yourself all you can, Mason. Be long time before we eat fancy sangwitches an' cake again. Bacon, moose-meat, an' bannock for us from to-morrow on."

"Oh, I rather like moose-meat and bacon, as it happens," smiled Mason. "Though I will admit, that a few of these excellent sandwiches and cakes once or twice per day would add great additional charm to our daily menu."

"I wonder how young Grayson will take to the simple, frugal fare of the trail?" mused Mrs. Weston aloud.

"Oh, he'll like it fine," postulated Angus confidently. "Ain't they goin' to have the finest trail-cook in country with them?" he asked with a broad grin.

"But I'm not going along, Angus?" observed Weston mildly.

"What you mean, you not goin' along? I know you ain't," said Angus with a frown of suspicion.

"I heard you say the best trail-cook in the country was going along, and as I'm not going, I don't quite get you," explained Weston with a well simulated air of honest inquiry.

"I mean me!" stated Angus firmly, pointing at his chest. "You know, Wess, you not even near my class when it comes to cookin' aroun' camp-fire."

"What I do like about you, Angus, is your sterling modesty," laughed Weston. "And you seem to get more and more modest as the years go by."

"I'm like you, Wess," retorted Angus with a grin. "I sure don't believe hidin' light under bushel. Don't say no more," he warned, holding up his hand. "I no time to talk to you now. Too busy with sangwitches."

"Coward!" shot Weston at him.

"You can call me all the bad names you like. You won't make me mad with all these fine sangwitches an' cakes aroun'," grinned Angus.

"No. That's about the only interest you have in the world, filling your stomach," snorted Weston.

Angus merely grinned, a rather superior grin, while he chewed with great deliberation. He simply refused to be dragged into any further argument just at this important time.

Shortly after they had finished the refreshments Angus got up and insisted on taking his departure. He explained he wanted to give his dogs an extra special feed to-night, so they would be in top form for the morning.

"Well, I'd better get along too," said Miss Warner, rising.

"Don't all of you run away at once," protested Betty Weston. "It's so seldom we entertain visitors from outside, so we want to make the most of it when we have the opportunity."

"But it's getting late. And as Corporal Mason is starting out for the North early in the morning, I suppose he'll want to get to bed," rejoined Miss Warner uncertainly.

"Don't worry about me, Miss Warner," smiled Mason.

"We policemen are like Pinkertons: We Never Sleep!"

"There you are," laughed Betty Weston. "Better stay for a while, if you aren't tired yourself, of course."

"No. I'm not a bit tired. I've only loafed all day. Well, since you are so kind to ask me to stay, I'll stay a little longer."

"Well, me, I ain't no Pinkerton-man," remarked Angus.

"I'm goin' right home to feed dogs an' sleep. You want to sen' letter along to Bill, Betty?"

"Oh, yes. I must write a few lines to Bill, and thank him for the moccasins and fur. I'll do it later. You'll be going over to the Barracks to see them off, Dick, won't you?" she asked her husband.

"Oh, quite. I have to give Angus a few pointers about how to take care of himself on the trail," answered Weston, grinning patronizingly at Angus, who bridled at the insult. "You got plenty nerve, you have, Wess!" snorted the insulted one, glaring at his tormentor. "Me, I forgotten more about trail than you ever know. An' you can tell 'em I tole you!"

"Don't mind him, Angus. He's only sore and jealous because he can't go himself," laughed Betty. "Well, Dick, since you're going over to the Barracks you can take the letter for Bill over for me in the morning."

"Oh, Mr. Weston. Would it be all right for me to go over there and see them start?" asked Miss Warner a little diffidently. "I've never seen dog-trains start out on a long journey before, and I should like to see it."

"Certainly, Miss Warner. Quite all right. You really oughtn't to miss the opportunity, now you're here. Tell you what I'll do. I'll call for you at the hotel about a quarter to seven, and we'll go over together," said Weston.

Mason felt like shaking hands with himself. He had planned to see Miss Warner to the train on the following day, but then this sudden patrol had to crop up to ruin everything. But now all was once more well in the best of all possible worlds, he decided gleefully.

"Yes. Do go along," urged Betty Weston. "It'll be a new experience for you. And then my husband will bring you back here for breakfast."

"Oh, really, that would be abusing your hospitality. You have really been too kind as it is," protested Miss Warner.

"Not at all. You come along, my dear. I won't take 'No' for an answer."

"Well, of course I should like to come, but . . ."

"No buts," interrupted Weston with a smile. "When my wife has once made up her mind, it stays made up."

"Well, my min' she's made up good too, an' I'm goin' right now," exclaimed Angus firmly. "Good-bye, Betty. An' take good care o' Wess while I'm not able to keep eye on him."

"Good-bye, Angus," smiled Betty, giving him a firm hand-clasp. "You take good care of yourself."

"Sure. Me always look after number one, good. Good night, Miss Warner. Good night, Wess. Good night, Mason. See you all to-morrow mornin'."

The short, wiry, bow-legged Angus donned his caribou coat, put on his woollen touque, pulled on his mittens, and rolled out into the cold night.

"Poor Angus," remarked Betty Weston, when he had gone. "I hope this trip will do him a world of good."

"I think it will," answered Weston gravely. "That's the reason I took him up so quickly on his offer. Getting away from here for a while is sure to do him good."

"Has he had any trouble?" asked Miss Warner.

Betty Weston told the story about Angus's bereavement, and when she had finished Miss Warner's eyes were moist.

"Poor man," she murmured. "What a horrible experience to lose all his dear ones in one cruel stroke like that. No wonder he wants to get away for a while. I noticed a sort of sad, wistful look about him, even when he was trying to be jolly, and I wondered."

Half an hour or so later Corporal Mason was escorting Miss Warner back to the hotel.

"What a lovely evening I've had," she exclaimed as they strode along. "And what charming people the Westons are."

"They certainly are," agreed Mason. "Mrs. Weston has constituted herself a sort of official mother to the Detachment. She's always doing all sorts of kind things to make our not unhappy lot still happier, as it were. She's a regular brick, and a great favourite with us all. We all worship her, in fact."

"I can quite believe it. And Inspector Weston must make a splendid commanding officer," continued Miss Warner. "He seems so kind, jolly, and easygoing."

Mason laughed.

"If you think the Inspector is easygoing, you're grossly mistaken," he chuckled. "In fact, he's one of the most exacting and strict of superiors, as far as duty goes. He demands and expects that every man does his duty to the very utmost of his ability. He hasn't the earthliest use for shirkers, slackers, or apologists. If he suspects that you are not quite up to the mark, he swoops down on you

like a hawk. And when he tells you off, you know it. He never raises his voice on those occasions, and he's always short and to the point; but he leaves those he's ticked off rather limp for several days, and with a very poor opinion of themselves, as it were. But if you just carry on and do your best, he'll stand by you and back you up whatever comes. And he's always ready to give us sound, good advice, and to hold out a helping hand to us. And, yes, he's certainly kind, as you remarked. I think he would give his last shirt to any needy chap who came along and asked for it. Though his shirt is not in any immediate danger, I must admit," he added with a grin, "seeing he's got ample private means."

"Oh. So the Westons have got money?"

"He has. Quite a slice. Quite a big slice, in fact. Oh, and I can tell you another deep, dark secret about him, if you'll promise to keep it to yourself."

"Go right ahead and tell it. Cross my heart, I won't let it go any farther," laughed Miss Warner.

"Inspector Weston is quite a bit of an egg back in the Old Country," confided Mason. "He'll be the Earl of Ernemount some day, when his uncle, the present holder of the title, dies. And Mrs. Weston will be the Countess of Ernemount. And Richard junior will be Viscount Something-or-other. Can't just remember what just off-hand. Rather a high-toned Inspector we've got, don't you think?"

"You're joking," exclaimed Miss Warner in strong unbelief.

"No. It's a fact. But don't you let the Westons know that I told you. The Inspector would flay me alive. He seems to look upon the whole thing as a sort of skeleton in the cupboard. He claims he's just a common or garden policeman, and as the House of Lords evidently has got on quite well without him for so long, he hopes it will be a long time before they'll need his services, if ever."

"Really, it's hard to believe that Mr. Weston is a future Earl," said Miss Warner. "He appears so unpretentious and democratic. I mean, he appears to be utterly without side, and that sort of thing."

"He certainly is. But there is really nothing more unpretentious and democratic than your true British aristocrat.

It's only the parvenus and social climbers who put on a tremendous lot of side, in the hope that people will be deluded into considering them more important in the social scheme of things than they really are. But remember, don't let the Westons know that I've let the cat out of the bag."

"I certainly shan't. But there is something I should like to ask you, if you don't mind. Are—are you going to start any inquiries about Dad during your trip?" she asked a little breathlessly.

Mason gravely nodded his head.

"Yes. That's the other business I have to attend to up there," he answered. "It's up in that part of the country that the Inspector thinks your father's claim is located. And I intend to make the most exhaustive inquiries. But I hope your father will be back long before I return. In any case, I'll write to you when I get a chance, and let you know how I make out, if you don't mind," he suggested a little diffidently.

"Please do. I shall be delighted to hear from you, and to hear about your trip. It must be very interesting to roam around up there in the wilderness. Dad never talks much about his trips. He's rather taciturn. But mother and I managed to drag a few stories out of him occasionally."

"Oh, now and then it's interesting, and at other times it's rather boring," observed Mason. "But what about your address? Will Miss Warner, Horton, Sask., be sufficient?"

"You'd better put Mary Warner. There's another Miss Warner in town, and I don't want my letter to go to her," she smiled.

"No, that wouldn't do at all. It would be too bad if my words of wisdom and wit should fall into the hands of the Philistines," he laughed.

They had now reached the hotel, and Mason followed Miss Warner into the rotunda, which was now quite empty except for the manager-clerk-etc., who was chewing gum and yawning at the same time behind the desk.

"Good night, Miss Warner. And then we shall be seeing you in the morning, when we start out?"

"Yes. I shall be there without fail. Good night, Corporal, and thank you so much for all your kindness." She smiled, holding out her hand, which Mason grasped heartily, after he had first hurriedly removed his gauntlet.

"Don't mention kindness. I've not done a thing," deprecated Mason. "It's been a great pleasure to meet you," he added lamely and conventionally, deploring that he could not think of anything more brilliant or polished to say. "Good night, Miss Warner."

He dropped her hand, turned, and strode out into the quiet street.

"Mary, Mary," he mumbled to himself, as he walked homewards, the frozen snow creaking sharply under his boots at each step. He liked the name "Mary," he decided. Sort of homely and short name without any frills. Suited Miss Warner. But what a simply wonderful girl she was. She certainly had affected him differently from any other girl he had ever met. When she had put her hand into his, and had smiled up at him back there in the hotel just now, he had felt strangely thrilled; and for one dizzy moment he would have given anything in the world to have the right to take her into his arms and kiss her. What was the matter with him, anyhow? he chided himself. Getting romantic or just plain foolish? But he knew the question was really only silly subterfuge. He knew perfectly well what was the matter with him. He loved Miss Warner. That was his trouble. The irony of it, he told himself, after his open confession. Here was he, twenty-six years old, with never an affair of the heart to trouble him in the past, and then he had to go and fall head over heels in love with a girl whom he had only known for about ten hours or so. And a girl who might not even be heart and fancy free. Though, stop! She seemed quite willing and eager for him to write to her. Did that not signify that she was quite free? Well, he was afraid he was not quite qualified to answer that question, he told himself moodily. It might be quite proper for a girl to receive letters from other men, though she was promised to one. He knew nothing about the conventions that ruled that sort of thing. But she had seemed rather pally. Anyhow, he was going to try his luck. Now, when he had at last

found a girl he could love, he was certainly not going to let her slip out of his life again without a struggle. At least not till he was quite definitely convinced that he was leading a forlorn hope. Of course, it was rather unfortunate that he had to start for the North to-morrow, and that she was returning to Horton. He wished they could have had a few more days together. Then perhaps he would have had a chance of finding out whether or not he had any prospect of winning her. But as soon as he got back from his journey he would certainly go down to Horton and see her. Quite frequently he had to go to Prince Albert on duty, and he could easily arrange to stay over in Horton for a few hours between trains on his way to Prince Albert, or on the return trip back, or both, if he used a little ingenuity. Oh, yes. He would manage somehow. But he did want to know if he had the slightest chance, he sighed as he entered the Barracks. And this was Mason, who at noon had decided that after to-day he would forget all about her!

CHAPTER VI

WHEN Miss Warner and Weston walked towards the Barracks on the following morning, grey dawn was spreading from the east. The tops of the spruce-trees in the eastern part of the forest which encircled the town stood out in dark, sharp, steeple-like silhouettes against the spreading light on the clear, eastern sky. The air was calm, but was infused with that biting, icy, breath-taking cold which always appears with the dawn, and which seems to penetrate to the very marrow of one's bones, no matter how well the body is protected against the rigours of the northern winter.

"Brrr! It's certainly cold. I rather pity the men who are going to start out on the trail in a temperature like this," observed Miss Warner, shivering a little in spite of her furs.

"And your pity would be entirely and absolutely wasted," chuckled Weston. "I'm willing to lay a wager that the objects of your pity are at this very moment congratulating themselves on having an ideal day for their start. Calm, clear weather, and no sign of any incipient blizzard. And they'll soon be warmer than is really required for comfort, once they start running after their dog-teams. So far from pitying them, I'm actually wildly envying them."

"Well, I'm not," smiled Miss Warner. "Not at this moment, at least. Where are they going to spend the night? In some Indian village?"

"Lord, no. They'll camp out in the bush, somewhere. I shouldn't be surprised if they cover about forty miles or so to-day with fresh dogs on a good trail. That is, of course, if Grayson can keep up with Mason and Angus.

They are both seasoned veterans, as it were, while he's an entirely dark horse. It's his first trip on the trail, as you heard last night."

"I don't think I should like very much sleeping out in the bush under the open sky in a cold like this," said Miss Warner. "But Dad used to tell me it was the best medicine in the world. He claimed that nobody ever got sick while camping out, even during the coldest and most rigorous winter."

"And he was quite right. Best tonic in the world, sleeping in the open. By the way, Mason is going to try to locate your father while he's up there. And I don't think he will have much difficulty about it. So if your father hasn't returned before Mason comes back, the corporal will bring news about him and will be able to explain the delay. That should help to allay your worries a little."

"Yes, Corporal Mason told me last night. But I really can't help worrying," she answered gravely. "But I must confess that I've taken new heart after all you people have been so extremely kind and sympathetic. And your hospitality has been simply wonderful. I expected to find myself utterly alone among strangers up here, and I hadn't been here for more than a few hours before I found myself adopted unconditionally as friend, and being treated like one of the family. I don't know how I'm ever going to repay your kindness."

"Ah, Miss Warner. You've misunderstood the whole situation," rejoined Weston with a grin. "You haven't grasped the deep Machiavelian scheming behind it all. You see, we Northerners have the reputation of being rough, tough, and uncouth customers. So when anyone from civilized parts comes to visit us, we naturally put our best foot forward, as it were, and play the white, fluffy, innocent lamb, so that we can save a few shreds of our reputation, at least."

"So that's it," laughed Miss Warner. "Well, it did seem to me that you were all playing unaccustomed parts last night, that seemed to come hard on you. Oh, there are the dog-trains standing in front of the Barracks," she cried.

Outside the Barracks two flat-bottomed, high-prowed dog-sleighs were drawn up. Five strong "Husky" dogs were lying in their harness in front of each, their heads lifted and alert, eagerly waiting for the command to start. Around the sleighs swarmed the members of the Detachment, augmented by a big, hefty half-breed. They were pulling tight straps and ropes, and were generally putting the finishing touches to the loads. By one sleigh stood Corporal Mason, by the other Angus, both obviously confining themselves to superintending and handing out advice. As Weston had stated to Miss Warner, they were both veterans of the trail, and far be it from them to soil their hands with vulgar, manual labour, when others volunteered to do it for them. But Grayson, the neophyte, who was still unversed in the wiles of sophisticated humanity, toiled with the rest. And as they toiled, much good-natured and humorous banter was hurled backwards and forwards.

"Just watch them," murmured Weston to his companion with a chuckle. "One should think they were starting for a Sunday-school picnic. Do you still pity them? And not a man with an overcoat on. That's what they think of the cold."

As soon as the toilers by the sleighs became aware of the Inspector's presence, they all straightened up and saluted. Even the big half-breed essayed a military salute, and not unsuccessfully. Only Angus stuck rigidly to his civilian status. He waved his hand languidly, and shouted with a broad grin:

"Hullo, Wess! Hullo, Miss Warner. Top o' mornin' to you!"

"Good morning, everybody," greeted Weston with a smile, touching his fur cap with his hand. "Everything about ready?"

"Yessir. We'll be starting in a few minutes," answered Mason, gravitating towards Miss Warner, who wished him a bright "Good morning."

"Hello, Alec," exclaimed Weston, turning to the big half-breed. "So you came along to give the boys a hand?"

"Sure, sir," grinned Alec Chaboye. "Least me could do, me think. When Grayson bring word last night, me

have to go on patrol, me not feel so gran'. You see, wife is down with col', an' not much time to fin' nobody to take care o' kids while me away. But duty is duty, I says. But when Grayson come back later an' say Angus goin' 'stead o' me, I feel jus' fine an' dandy, you bet. I could kiss Angus for dat."

"Hey!" shouted Angus in mock alarm. "If you try push them whiskers o' yourn near my face, me shout for help, an' sic dogs on you." Angus seemed in great, high spirits that morning.

"I'm sorry to hear about your wife, Alec," said Weston. "Is she very bad?"

"No. Just a cold. But has stay in bed."

"Had the doctor yet?"

"No. Not bad as all that."

"Oh, well, Mrs. Weston will be over to see her this afternoon, after I've told her."

"Dat sure fine, sir," said Alec with a huge grin.

"Missis Weston sure better dan any doctor, you bet."

Weston smiled and walked over to Angus to give him Betty's letter for Bill Jennings, and to have a chat.

In the meantime Mason was introducing Miss Warner to his fellow officers, was showing her the dogs, and was explaining to her roughly the mode of travel on the winter-trails. Weston watched them out of the corner of his eyes, while he was chatting with Angus. His wife had made a postulation after their guests had left the preceding night, and he was trying to discover how much foundation there was to it.

"You know, Dick," Betty Weston had volunteered. "I feel sure that Miss Warner and Mason are getting extremely interested in each other."

"Oh, nonsense, Betty. You really must be mistaken," Weston had protested. "They haven't known each other for more than a minute or so. And besides, Mason never seems to have taken any interest in girls."

"Well, he's taken an interest now. You men are so blind you can't see anything even if it's right under your noses. Mason was following her with his eyes all evening, and he was always manoeuvring to get as close to her as possible. And when Miss Warner was helping me out

in the kitchen, she kept on asking questions about Mason. Even if we discussed what brand of tea was preferable to the others she somehow managed to get the subject shifted adroitly round to the seemingly absorbing subject of your corporal. So don't tell me. I've got a keen eye for that sort of thing."

"Oh, but hang it all. They never met before this morning, Betty. So . . ."

"What has that got to do with it?" interrupted Betty. "Just tell me, as a mere matter of record, how long did it take you to fall in love with me?"

"Oh . . . ah . . . Well, that's an entirely different matter," stammered Weston, taken at a disadvantage, and trying to carry it off with a touch of dignity. "That's absolutely and entirely different, and has nothing to do with this matter."

"Oh, rats!" exclaimed Betty rudely. And they both laughed.

As Weston now watched the two, his eyes sharpened by his wife's observations, he had to admit that there were certainly signs that she wasn't so far wrong. Mason had something of that wistful look of a little child contemplating the show-window of a sweet-shop, as he played squire to the girl. Oh, well. Youth is youth, he mused. . . . "Eh? What's that, Angus?" He abruptly turned from romantic to mundane matters.

"I say, all ready for start," repeated Angus. "Hey, Mason!" he called. "You an' Grayson get you caribou coats. An' get mine. It's lyin' on chair in front office. We'll get move on."

As soon as he yelled all the dogs promptly jumped to their feet, howling joyfully, and straining at their harness, their tails wagging. They obviously sensed that they were about to start.

"Whoa! Whoa!" shouted Angus, grinning all over. "Take it easy, you houn'-dogs. We ain't set to go for a minute or so."

The two officers hurried into the Barracks, and soon emerged dressed for the trail. Grayson handed Angus's coat to him, and the latter quickly pulled it on. There followed hurried handshakes and "God-speeds" all

around, while the dogs made valiant and noisy efforts to wake every soul in town that wasn't awake already. In the general confusion and bustle Mason only found time to shake Miss Warner's hand hastily, and say a hurried: "Good-bye. I hope I shall see you again soon." But the warm smile she bestowed on him amply made up for the lack of opportunity for the more lingering and intimate leave-taking he had hoped for.

"All set?" shouted Angus, whose team was in the lead, as he uncoiled his long snake-whip.

"All set, Angus!" cried Mason.

"Mush!" yelled Angus, cracking his whip sharply in the air over his dogs. The dogs eagerly hurled themselves forward in their harness, the sleigh made a creaky forward lurch, and they were off.

"Mush!" shouted Mason in his turn. And the next moment his dogs were sprinting after Angus's team, he and Grayson running behind the sleigh.

It was now almost broad daylight, and a bright, pink-and-gold streak on the eastern horizon showed that the sun was not far off.

Half a block down the street the dogs turned to the right around a small bluff of spruce-trees, following a sleigh-track which led down to the river across some vacant land. Before Mason followed his sleigh around the bluff, where they would finally vanish from view from the group left in front of the Barracks, he stepped aside, and stopped, letting Grayson run past him. He turned around and waved his hand. Four hands waved back, but the efforts of three were totally wasted. Mason only saw one. Then he turned again, ducked out of sight behind the bluff, and then raced after Grayson and his team, which were now quite some distance ahead.

Soon they arrived at the point where the trail dipped steeply down to the river below. Angus and Mason grabbed ropes on their sleighs to check the downward speed of the heavy sleighs, which might otherwise crash into the dogs, and cause damage to some or all of them. The dogs broke into a gallop, and Angus and Mason had to sprint hard and furiously to avoid being thrown and dragged ignominiously behind their sleighs. But all went

well, and they both saved themselves from humiliation.

Down on the wide river the dogs settled down to a fast, steady trot. It was cold down there. An icy draught swept down from the north, and they all threw the hoods of their caribou coats over their heads, and pulled them well down over their faces.

Angus set a sharp pace, but Mason managed to keep up with him. He had formed the firm and solemn resolution that he was going to show Angus that the police-dogs were as good as his. Occasionally he cast a look back over his shoulder to see how Grayson was faring. The youngster seemed to be running easily and without any effort. Evidently he had a good pair of lungs, and was in good training, and Mason grinned encouragingly to him.

Soon the sun rose over the horizon, and the sudden, brilliant, scintillating glitter from the millions of frost-crystals on the snow, which reflected the sunlight, almost blinded them for a moment.

A few miles up the river the trail turned to the left up the river-bank and across a tract of almost barren muskeg. After they had traversed this they again struck the river, which formed a big bend around the tract. They crossed the river, and at last entered the deep forest. A broad avenue had been cut through the trees for the trail. It was wide enough to allow the passage of the horse-teams and sleighs which during the winter hauled the freight for the Hudson's Bay Company and the Revillion Freres Trading Company as far up as to Moose Lake, about two hundred miles to the north-west.

They made a stop for an hour or so around noon, to rest the dogs, and to "boil a kettle" and prepare some grub for themselves.

"This is sure the life, boys," grunted Angus with intense satisfaction, as they were all puffing at their pipes while waiting for the kettle to boil. Angus's back was resting comfortably against a snow-covered boulder, which he had providentially discovered. "Feels dam' good be on trail again. Top-hole, as Wess says."

"Not half bad," agreed Mason lazily. "What do you think about it, Grayson? Plenty of exercise, what?"

"Rather. Just what the old system craved for," answered Grayson cheerfully. "Good training for a Marathon race and that sort of thing, I should say. I didn't freeze my face, by any chance?" he asked, turning towards Mason for inspection.

Mason took a look at his face.

"No. Your smooth, youthful mug is still intact and unblemished. Afraid of spoiling your beauty?"

"Something of the sort," grinned Grayson. "Of course, you have nothing to worry about, having none to spoil."

Mason bridled and glared. The youngster was getting above himself. Quite above himself, and needed taking down a peg or two, he decided.

"Don't you think you'd better put away that pipe, son?" he asked with fatherly solicitude. "I shouldn't like to have you sick, you know."

"Oh, you go and chase yourself," murmured Grayson politely.

"Say, you fellows stop row!" cried Angus. "Kettle about on boil. One o' you go ahead an' fry them tinned sausages. Use plenty butter."

"I thought you had agreed to be the cook?" asked Mason. "Seems to me I heard you mention that you were the champion trail-cook of the world, and that sort of thing."

"Sure. That quite right," grinned Angus. "Me cook dinner. Need expert for that. Any fool can fry sausages, an' make tea. So go right ahead. Me plenty hungry."

"You've got nerve, Angus!" exclaimed Mason. "But knowing you're a stubborn cuss, I shan't waste any time arguing with you. So that leaves it up to you, Grayson."

"What. To argue?"

"No. To cook."

"Wouldn't it be rather presumptuous of me to display my lack of culinary cunning in front of you two experts?" asked Grayson smoothly. "Angus claims that he's THE champion cook of the universe, and you've always boasted around the Barracks about your outstanding skill and efficiency amongst the pots and pans. So what?"

"So what, nothing!" said Mason sternly. "There's

the frying-pan, the tin of sausages is in the grub-box, and there's the fire. So get busy, young man. I was instructed to break you in for trail-work, and here beginneth the first lesson."

"Oh, well," sighed Grayson, resignedly getting up, and heading for the grub-box, "what has to be, has to be, I suppose. I think you're both frauds, and are only bragging when you say you can cook. I don't think any of you can cook at all. Good thing you have me along to save you from starvation," he shot at them with an impudent grin.

Refreshed after their rest and food, they pushed on up the trail, which ran north with a slight slant towards the west. Frequently the forest opened out to give place for small lakes, and big lakes, and open tracts of muskeg, where only scattered clumps of brush grew. But always, after they had crossed these places, the forest again closed in on them, leaving only the men-made lane, a mere gash through its primeval denseness, as a passage for them.

When the rays of the sinking sun were barely touching the tops of the tallest spruces, and dusk was beginning to pervade the trail below, Angus drove his sleigh into a small clearing off the trail to the left, and stopped.

"Fine place to camp," he announced, when Mason drove up and halted his own sleigh. "Plenty dry wind-falls aroun'."

"Just the sort of place the doctor ordered," agreed Mason, looking around. "Dig out the axe, Grayson, and wade into the wood-pile, while Angus and I unharness our dogs and chain them up."

"Right, Professor," retorted Grayson, grabbing the axe-handle, which was sticking out of the load. "Do I cut it into any particular lengths, and do I split any?"

"Yes. Split some for kindling. Six-seven feet lengths will do. But don't split the logs. They'll do fine as they are."

"Right, Governor. Just as you say." And Grayson began to wade through the deep snow towards the wind-falls.

Angus lifted his head from his task of unharnessing his dogs, and looked after Grayson with an approving smile.

"Seems all right," he confided to Mason. "He's takin' to trail fine."

"Like a duck to water," grunted Mason. "He kept up with us like a brick to-day, and we certainly did some fast travelling."

"We sure did. Guess we make about forty miles. Perhaps more."

"About that, I should say."

Under Angus's and Mason's practised hands the camp was soon prepared, and in order. A roaring, scorching fire of dry spruce-logs, piled lengthwise on top of each other, was casting its light around the rapidly darkening clearing. A thick mat of spruce-boughs lay to one side of the fire, and on this were placed their bed-rolls and kit-bags. A little away from the big fire Angus had built a smaller cooking-fire, and he was now critically examining the contents of the grub-box to determine the menu. Alongside the big fire ten good-sized whitefish were leaning up against a log to thaw out, each fish the daily ration for one dog.

The corporal had joined Grayson among the wind-falls, and the two were cutting the logs into suitable lengths and hauling them over near the fire.

"Say, haven't we got about enough wood now?" asked Grayson presently, surveying their growing wood-supply. "We can't possibly burn all this to-night and to-morrow morning."

"Quite. But you never know if we'll be held up by a blizzard to-morrow, so it's just as well to be prepared."

Grayson looked up at the clear sky overhead, where a myriad of stars were glittering and sparkling.

"Doesn't look like any blizzard is in the offing," he observed. "The sky is as clear as can be, and the air is quite calm."

"Rather. But you don't know what may happen before morning. Blizzards have a nasty way of sneaking up on you, and swooping over you when you least expect them. So a good rule of the trail is always to be prepared for them. And it's a darn sight more agreeable to rustle fire-wood when it's fine, than when snow is trickling and dripping down your neck, filling your life with misery and mis-

anthropy. So we'll just carry on till Angus has prepared the feast. But you might go over and see if the dog-fish are thawed out. If they are soft, chuck the dogs one apiece."

"Nasty smell that fish has got when it's thawing," observed Grayson, wrinkling his nose. "I feel as if I could never enjoy fish again. That stench seems to stick in your nostrils."

"Oh, you'll get used to it in time. Run along now, like a good boy, and kid yourself that the fish are a bunch of fragrant violets."

The fish were quite soft, and with wrinkled nose, and a few hearty curses for their slipperiness, Grayson picked them up, one by one, and flung them to the dogs, who were eagerly and avidly waiting. A few eager snaps, a crunching noise when teeth met fish-bones, a few gulps, and the whitefish were only ten memories. The dogs then curled up and prepared for sleep, their day definitely over.

Grayson returned to his wood-cutting.

At last Mason called a halt, and they went over to the spruce-mat and sat down. Mason picked up his kit-bag and hauled forth fresh socks and moccasins.

"Better change your socks and moccasins too, Grayson," he said. "And put those you have on near the fire on sticks to dry."

"But my feet aren't wet," protested Grayson.

"Perhaps not, and then again, perhaps. You wouldn't feel it if they were a little moist. But that is another rule of the trail: always change your footgear at night, and dry what you've been wearing. It's the safest way to avoid frost-bitten feet."

"Gosh! It seems to me you don't believe in taking any chances on the trail," grinned Grayson.

"Can't afford to. When you have to depend on your own feet, and arms, and body, for that matter, to get you places, you certainly have to pamper them if you don't want to come to grief."

"Sounds like a pretty sensible philosophy," agreed Grayson. "Well, if it's the rule of the trail, here goes." He reached out for his own kit-bag, and followed Mason's example. Angus's socks and moccasins were already hang-

ing in strategical positions near the fire, not too near, where they would be scorched.

Their footwear disposed of, Mason turned his attention to the cook. He sniffed the air, and caught the appetizing odour of frying meat and boiling coffee. But there was an additional odour, which somehow eluded and puzzled him.

"Say, Angus, what are you cooking?" he called.

"You wait and see," answered Angus, turning a smiling face towards the inquirer.

But Mason didn't intend to wait and see. His suspicion had been aroused, and he wanted to find out right away what caused that delicious but elusive odour. He jumped to his feet and walked over to the cooking-fire.

"I thought so! Flap-jacks!" he shouted gleefully. "Hanged if the man isn't making flap-jacks! Hear that, Grayson? Moose-meat, and bacon, and flap-jacks, and bannock. . . ." He checked himself suddenly and bent over the frying-pan in which the bacon and meat were sizzling. "Say, Angus!" he exclaimed. "That isn't moose-meat. Don't tell me it's venison?"

"Yessiree. A-one deer-meat," answered Angus with a proud grin, which almost split his face.

"Whoopee!" yelled the exuberant Mason. "Hear that, Grayson? We're having venison steak and bacon. Amend my former advice in accordance, etc. But where on earth did the venison come from? We only have a chunk of frozen moose-meat in our grub-box."

"Had the deer-meat in my pack," explained the delighted Angus. "Got a fine hunk not long ago, so I think take it along an' make surprise."

"Good man!" cried Mason, slapping Angus heartily on the back. "But do get a hustle on with that meal. I feel as starved as a cannibal who hasn't seen a white missionary for a week. What are you serving as dessert?"

"Tinned pine-apple," announced Angus.

"Gosh! Better and better," ejaculated Mason, rubbing his stomach. "Well, do get a move on. There's a good fellow," he pleaded, almost with tears in his voice.

"Almost ready now. Coffee has been boilin' good. Just small minute, an' all honky-dory."

Twenty minutes or so later they were all leaning com-

fortably back against their bedding-rolls, pipes going, peace in their hearts. Of the meal Angus had prepared nothing was left but a few grounds in the coffee-pot. The flaming fire cast a ruddy light on their extremely satisfied faces.

"Oh, boy! Oh, boy! That was certainly some banquet," sighed Grayson heavily. "If this is an example of how you do yourselves on the trail, then give me the trail every day."

"Well, what you think o' cook now?" smiled Angus.

"Full marks and head of the class for you," answered Grayson promptly. "Good thing we have some running to do to-morrow, or I would be getting fat. I feel so satisfied with life just now, that I shan't even kick at washing dishes."

"Say, Mason," said Angus suddenly. "This about where Wess, an' you, an' me camped the time we went up to get that fella Charley Crow. Remember? Gosh, this first time I hit trail since then. It's two years now since then," he ended with a sigh, recollection coming back to him of the cruel blows Fate had dealt him since that time.

"Yes. It was somewhere around here we had our first camp on the trip up. Tough baby, the late Charley Crow was," remarked Mason lazily.

"And who was Charley Crow?" asked Grayson.

"You tell him, Angus," said Mason complacently. "I'm too full of good food to talk just now."

So Angus told Grayson about Charley Crow, the Indian who murdered the foreman of a lumber-camp near Prince Albert, and later Corporal Connor of the Police. And told the story of how Inspector Weston, Mason, and he had trapped and captured the desperado up near Beaver Lake.

In the meantime Mason was lying with his hands clasped behind his head, staring into the fire. He did not listen to Angus's story. He knew it by heart.

His thoughts had strayed back to Mary Warner. Oh, yes. He called her Mary to himself by now. He wondered if she was at all thinking of him? And if, what her thoughts were? Did she merely consider him a member of the Force, or were her thoughts just a little more personal?

He tried to recall her expression when he had been talking with her. She had always seemed very friendly. Yes,

he conceded that. But had there been any additional warmth or interest behind her friendliness, reserved for him alone? There were moments when he had thought so, but perhaps it was only imagination on his part. She seemed to have the sort of temperament which naturally dispensed friendliness towards everyone. But, but . . . And so his thoughts chased one another around in a fast game of merry-go-round. He was merely a young man in love. And like other young men in the same predicament, his imagination ranged freely between the supreme ecstasy of optimism and the depths of acute pessimism when he tried to solve in his mind the all-important, profound, and obscure problem of what She thought of him. . . .

" . . . an' so hangman settle Charley Crow's hash for him," ended Angus his yarn, his voice sounding as if he considered this a perfectly happy ending. " An' now you better wash dishes, an' we'll roll in. You asleep, Mason? "

Mason, directly addressed in this prosaic and off-hand manner, decided guiltily to come back to earth.

" No. I was not asleep. I was only thinking of how we could get this madman without bloodshed and that sort of thing," he lied brazenly. " Want me to give you a hand with those dishes, Grayson? " he asked graciously.

" No, thanks. I'll do the dish-washing to-night, and after breakfast to-morrow, if you cook the breakfast," said Grayson.

" I suspected there was a string to your willingness somewhere," grinned Mason. " All right. I'd rather cook than muck around with greasy dishes any day."

An hour later they were stretched out side by side on the spruce-mat, each rolled up in his respective bedding. They had tucked their bed-clothes well around them, special and careful attention having been given to places where the insidious, freezing night-air might manage to bore in.

Mason and Angus were already fast asleep, breathing deeply, their heads covered by their blankets. But Grayson had not been able to fall asleep yet. It was all so new to him. He had camped under the open sky before, but this was the first time he had camped in the open in the midst of a northern winter. Following his companions' explicit advice he had first covered his head, but after a few

minutes he felt half choked and smothered, and stuck his head out into the open again. But trying to sleep with his head uncovered proved to have worse drawbacks. The exposed parts of his pillow and blankets were so strongly chilled by the cold air that if he only moved his head the slightest, it felt as if his face touched ice. So he decided that of two evils, it was better to choke in warm comfort. But first he would fill his lungs with fresh air.

He lay staring at the fire, which was still burning brightly. And while he was watching the flickering flames, which chased each other up and down the logs, he suddenly became aware of a stealthy movement to the right of the fire. He lay still and watched. Soon he saw a white bush-rabbit come cautiously hopping into the circle of light. It sat for a while looking curiously at the fire, its little eyes gleaming like rubies in the reflected glare from the light. But suddenly a burning log crackled sharply, and the rabbit turned like a flash and was gone. Grayson grinned. The rabbit had looked such a homely, friendly little animal out here in these inhospitable, dark woods.

After a while he saw several more rabbits here and there. They all seemed to be watching and wondering, and ever ready to beat a hasty retreat. Evidently the fire had aroused their most avid curiosity.

At last Grayson decided to try once more to go to sleep. He covered his head, and settled down. But even though he felt tired and drowsy, sleep would not come to him at once. The dark, silent forest around him from time to time sent forth queer noises. Now and then he heard startlingly loud "cracks", as if somebody had fired a rifle in amongst the trees, and at other times he heard weird, melancholy cries, which sounded as if they emanated from a frightened and distressed child. But his companions had earlier explained that these noises were merely caused by trees cracking with frost, and snow-owls, that were hooting in amongst the timber. But even so, they were very disturbing and eerie, when they suddenly crashed in on the prevailing, all-embracing, hushed silence of the austere woods.

Once he heard a wild, weird howl in the far distance, and he decided it must come from a marauding timber-wolf.

But gradually these sounds registered less and less on his consciousness, and soon he fell into a deep, dreamless sleep. . . .

A sharp crackling sound woke him suddenly. For a second it sounded as if their spruce-mat had caught fire, and he hastily tossed the bed-clothes away from his face. What he saw was Angus, hunched over the site of their late fire, now reduced to ashes, a heap of burning, crackling birch-bark and dry twigs in front of him. Grayson looked up into the sky. The stars were still sparkling brightly, and there were no signs of approaching day.

"Hullo, Angus," he called drowsily, his voice sounding a little rusty. "What are you building a fire for in the middle of the night?"

Angus turned his head and grinned at him.

"Time to roll out," he announced. "After six now, an' we want get early start."

"Right oh. I'll come and give you a hand with the fire." Grayson crawled out of his lair, and pulled on his tunic and caribou coat, the only articles of wearing apparel he had discarded last night on going "to bed". The sharp, nippy morning air made him shiver a little.

Mason was still evidently fast asleep.

"Hey, Corporal! Time for all good men to be on deck!" shouted Grayson brutally and unfeelingly.

"Don't disturb a fellow in the middle of his beauty-nap," came a plaintive, muffled voice from somewhere inside Mason's bedding. "You run along and help Angus build the fire as you promised, and don't make such a beastly row in my bed-chamber. And say, draw my bath while you are at it, and call me when it's ready."

"What can you do with a fellow like that?" asked Grayson of the world in general. "All right, you grouchy sleepy-head. Stay there! But don't forget you have to cook breakfast."

"Please, don't start the day by bringing up painful subjects that I'm trying with all my might to forget," came the muffled reproach. "Run along now, little boy, and don't bother your uncle."

Soon a roaring fire was crackling merrily, and Mason pushed a cautious head from under the bed-clothes. Find-

ing matters to his liking, he crawled out of his nest and approached the fire, yawning and stretching.

"This is fine," he remarked between two yawns. "I thank you fellows for supplying a touch of home comforts to my miserable existence. Nothing like having a couple of pals along on the trail to cater to one's comfort, is my motto. How'd you sleep, Grayson?"

"So-so. It took me quite some time to get to sleep last night."

"Ah-haw," yawned Mason. "You'll get used to it in time. Well, I'd better start making breakfast."

"Shall I put over a pot of snow to melt, so we get water for washing ourselves?" asked Grayson.

Mason and Angus grinned broadly at each other.

"You tell him, Angus," cried Mason. "I don't have the heart to break the cruel, soul-shattering news to him."

"Listen, Grayson. We never wash on trail," explained Angus. "Just rub han's an' face with snow, an' dry well. That's all."

Grayson looked from one to the other with a tentative smile. He felt convinced that there was a joker concealed somewhere in Angus's preposterous statement, and he was ready to laugh as soon as the joke had been explained to him.

"No. Angus is telling you the bald truth," said Mason, who guessed what was passing in Grayson's mind. "When it is very cold, like now, we avoid as much as possible to wash on the trail. The less you wash the less risk you run of getting frost-bitten. And the less you freeze yourself the better off you are. So the slogan is: Don't wash! And the same goes for shaving. Shaving should only be indulged in when more or less civilized places are approached. You won't find this most important rule in our Regulations; but it ought to be included. A good rubbing of snow, and the toilet is *tout finis*, as it were." And Mason promptly let the deed follow the words.

Grey twilight was still lingering down among the tall spruce-trees that lined each side of the trail, when they started out once more. But a clear, blue sky overhead gave promise of another day of good travel.

And so they continued day after day. Corporal Mason

had three problems constantly occupying his mind, both on trail and in camp. One was how to secure the homicidal lunatic up at Beaver Lake, another was how to set about his search for Joe Warner. These two problems alternated, keeping half of his mind occupied. But the other half was wrestling exclusively with a matter far removed from police work and routine. It was the absorbing problem of Joe Warner's daughter which had firmly established itself in that portion of his reasoning faculties. And as the days passed he found much to wonder and marvel at.

It had occurred to him that, with the steadily widening distance and time which separated them, the memory of her would get dimmer and vaguer, and that it might finally be obscured to the point where it would appear more or less as a dream of the past. But he found that so far from becoming dimmer and vaguer, her picture seemed to stand out with clearer distinction in his mind as time passed. He always seemed to see her features before him, and always that sweet, somewhat wistful, smile played about her lips, that smile which had so attracted and fascinated him down at Portage Bend. One thing that amazed him was, that details of her appearance, which he did not recall having even noticed at the time they were together, now seemed to crop up from nowhere, gradually to complete the picture his mind formed. He found it an almost uncanny experience. But as it was he always saw her image in the camp-fire at night, and it seemed to float ahead of him on the trail at day.

At times Mason was building lofty and beautiful castles in the air, and at other times he was gloomily wondering whether he was not after all merely chasing the end of the rainbow. His mood oscillated between the highest exhilaration and the deepest depression. But withal life seemed to him to have acquired a significance and volume which was utterly new to him, and it seemed to have become filled with a wistful, gentle yearning, which was not displeasing. He was beginning to feel that he had at last found something which had been missing in his life up to now.

But as has been stated before, Mason's novel mood of sentiment and romance did not quite fill his mind to the

exclusion of everything else. Half of his mind was still reserved for his work.

At every settlement and trading-post they passed he made inquiries about Joe Warner and his companion. But they seemed to have been an elusive pair. Nobody seemed to have seen them.

Mason had set his greatest hope about picking up information about the pair at "Charley's Place". This was a rest-camp, established and maintained by the contractor, who had the haulage of the stuff for the two fur-companies from Portage Bend to Moose Lake. Here the teams and men could enjoy a few days of relaxation during their long haul. The camp was situated about one hundred and fifty miles to the north-west of Portage Bend, a few miles north of the fork where the northwards trails from Prince Albert and Portage Bend joined. This camp had as its presiding genius an old-timer known to all simply as Charley. His surname had somehow become lost or mislaid as far as that part of the country was concerned. For quite a few years Charley had been the sole ruler and arbiter of the camp. He arrived with his supplies as soon as the winter-trails allowed the passage of horse-teams and heavy sleighs, and in the spring he departed for parts unknown.

Charley knew everyone who had ever travelled along that trail, and his camp was the clearing-house for all the news and gossip in the district. It was a tradition for all travellers to linger at least for a while and pass the time of day with Charley, even if they were in a hurry, and had no time to accept Charley's invariable, hospitable offer of the meal he would "shake up in the wag o' a sheep's tail". But most travellers timed themselves so that they could either partake of one of Charley's meals, which were always excellent, or so that they could spend the night in the camp's roomy bunk-house. As the trail ran right through the camp, past the cook-house, and as Charley's work-table was placed right in front of the cook-house window, there were mighty few travellers, if any, who slipped past Charley's keen eyes unobserved.

But to Mason's keen disappointment Charley had no information to offer about Warner and his companion.

Nor had the two ever figured in any of the trail-gossip brought to Charley's Place. Charley was extremely apologetic and deprecating about it. He rather felt that his inability to furnish information was a grave reflection on the camp, and that it was a sort of blot on its escutcheon. In self-defence he even suggested that Warner and his companion must have taken some other route. And even Mason began to wonder whether Charley wasn't right.

But a few days later Mason had a stroke of luck. They happened to run across a half-breed trapper, who had actually met Warner and his companion on the trail. They were heading towards Beaver Narrows when he met them, but they were a few days' travel south of that point. But Mason's informant could furnish very little further information. They had only passed on the trail, and the half-breed had been too busy keeping his dogs from picking a fight with the other team to be able to pay much attention to them. He was sure it was Warner, because they had met before, and Warner had greeted him by name, and had given him a cheerful grin. But the latter's companion had been a stranger to him. And he could not give much of a description of him. He had been closely wrapped up in a caribou coat, with the hood well down over his face. But he said he was a short and rather stocky fellow, with whiskers all over his face, and that he had seemed rather short and unfriendly. In fact, he had not even opened his mouth for a simple "Howdy", and such a flagrant breach of trail-etiquette had rather stung the man at the time.

One circumstance that was a decided obstacle to obtaining information about the elusive pair was, that at the time they were travelling northwards, most of the trappers were busy on their trap-lines, so very few people had actually travelled along the main trails. But even so, Mason found it rather peculiar that the two and their dog-team seemed to have passed settlements and trading-posts quite unobserved. It looked as if they had deliberately avoided being seen.

"Curse these prospectors and their exaggerated secretiveness!" grumbled Mason to himself after each fruitless inquiry. This was going to make the task of locating

Warner much more difficult than he had imagined. All he knew was that the two prospectors had been heading towards Beaver Narrows during part of their journey; but where had they left the main trail? And which direction had they taken?

Well, all he could do at present was to continue his inquiries along the trail till he arrived at Beaver Narrows, and if he could obtain no further information about the missing men there, he would have to make a systematic canvass of the Indian villages and Reserves until he found the one where Warner's unknown Indian friend lived. But that would be a long and tedious task. However, it was no use to lay any plans about it till they reached Beaver Narrows and had finished their task up there.

They continued making good time; but a little north of Moose Lake, when they had only three more days to go till they reached Beaver Narrows, they suffered a very annoying set-back.

One forenoon the horizon began to take on a dull, greyish aspect all around, and especially was this noticeable in the north-western section. Up there the grey rapidly thickened to bluish black, while the grey began to spread gradually over the whole of the blue sky as a veil.

"Blizzard comin' up!" shouted Angus back over his shoulder to the others. "A north-wester, an' she's goin' be plenty tough. An' she's comin' fast."

Mason nodded, and looked anxiously up at the sky. They were traversing a wide tract of open muskeg, with no shelter except for a few scattered, sparse, scraggy bluffs, that would offer no protection against a raging blizzard. The heavy forest was three or four miles behind them, and a mile or so ahead he knew there was a lake to cross, which was about three miles wide.

"What do you think we'd better do, Angus?" he shouted, without checking the speed of the dogs. "Shall we go on or turn back?"

"Better go on!" shouted Angus back without stopping. "Guess we strike forest on other side o' lake before blizzard real bad! Plenty o' good campin'-places across lake."

"Right oh! But we'll have to try to get some more speed out of our dogs."

They cracked their whips and shouted to their teams, and the dogs answered nobly to the call. They seemed to sense that extra effort was required, and they threw themselves valiantly forward in their harness.

The veil overhead thickened, and gradually the sun grew dimmer and dimmer. And as the sunlight lost its brilliance the greyiness of the landscape increased, until it stood out in bleak, cold austerity. The weak, diffused sunlight cast an eerie, ghostly light over the whole scene.

The blue-black thickening up in the north-west gradually gained in volume, and developed into black and purple clouds, which began to roll heavily up the sky. Gusts of wind began to blow, fitfully and intermittently, which drove grains of loose snow ahead of them over the frozen surface of the older snow with a hissing sound as if they were rubbing against sandpaper.

And the temperature seemed to drop steadily, though they knew this to be a delusion, as the temperature actually rises before a blizzard. But the men shuddered in their caribou coats in spite of their violent exertion in keeping up with the racing dogs. They drew their coats closer around them, and pulled their hoods farther down over their faces.

The black clouds continued to roll upwards and upwards from the horizon, widening across the sky as they proceeded. The icy wind freshened and began to blow more steadily. And soon the last lingering vestige of sunlight was wiped out, and the daylight dwindled almost to dusk.

A few flakes of snow began to fall as they reached the middle of the lake, and Angus and Mason, who had experienced many blizzards in the past, knew that the fury of the oncoming storm would soon strike them.

To Grayson a northern blizzard was a new experience, and he looked with some trepidation at the quickly thickening sky, and the open lake all around. The forest ahead, which was their nearest shelter, seemed so hopelessly far away. The increasing wind seemed to cut right through his clothes, and freeze his body. He shuddered a little, and wondered what would happen to them if they were not able to reach the other shore in time.

The dogs were now going at their utmost speed, and the

two dog-drivers were shouting encouragements to them, and cracking their whips.

They still had about a mile to go when the storm broke over them. First there was a lull in the wind, while the snow-flakes continued to dance in the air. Then a black wall seemed to be coming straight for them over the tree-tops on the opposite shore. Then suddenly a howling, screaming gust of wind struck them, and so violent was its onslaught, that they had to lean well forward into it to avoid being thrown out of balance backwards. No sooner had that gust swept past them, when another struck them, and then suddenly the howling, shrieking furies were over them. In a second the whole world around them was blotted out by blinding, stinging snow. They gasped for breath as the full fury of the blizzard struck them, and they bent their heads into the gale, and stumbled forward, almost bent double. Grayson felt as if he was choking. He opened his mouth to gulp down air, but the icy, stinging wind set him coughing violently. He stumbled along behind the vague, grey shadow ahead of him, which he knew was Mason. He felt as if he were fighting his way through wild, turbulent, torrential cascades of snow, which threatened to sweep him off his feet and smother him. It sounded as if he were surrounded by howling, shrieking demons, which reached clawing fingers out for him. He could hardly see, could hardly breathe. It was excruciating agony to struggle on against this mad, wild turmoil. He lost all sense of direction and time. He did not know where he was going, he could only follow Mason's hardly distinguishable, shadowy form there in front. He could hear no other sound but the shrieking wind. Even the tinkling of the dog-bells was drowned out, though the gale was blowing from that direction.

He seemed to have been struggling through this raging, blinding uproar for hours, when its force seemed to abate somewhat. Gradually the force of the driving gale actually lessened, and the contours of Mason's figure grew more clear. Then suddenly he stumbled as through an open gateway into the shelter of the forest. He felt somewhat like a ship, which had found sanctuary behind a break-water after having been buffeted, pounded, and tossed by

the raging fury of a hurricane. The snow still fell thickly, but lightly, now, when the driving gale was no longer whipping it into their faces. But the forest around groaned, creaked, and tossed as the trees were buffeted by the roaring gale. It sounded almost as if some gigantic, wounded animal was threshing around in there in its death-agony.

Angus had halted his dog-team as soon as he was well inside the shelter of the trees.

"Well, how's she goin'?" he asked with a grin, when the others came up to him. "All well an' dandy?"

"Quite," puffed Mason, still struggling to regain his breath. "How did you like that, Grayson?" he asked, turning to the youngster. "Say!" he added hurriedly. "Your chin and cheeks are frozen. Rub them with snow at once."

"The tip of your nose is frozen too," answered Grayson, scooping up some snow with his mitten, and rubbing vigorously.

"Thanks," said Mason, following suit. "You frozen your face, Angus?"

"How in hell do me know?" inquired Angus. "You look an' see."

"Left cheek nipped a little," announced Mason. "But I think you'll survive."

"Gosh. That left cheek always give trouble," grumbled Angus, as he in his turn went in for some energetic rubbing. "Froze it once bad. Can't behave since then."

Soon this matter was satisfactorily adjusted, and they started their dog-teams again. Angus informed them he knew of a good camping-place half a mile or so ahead.

A few hours later they were comfortably established in a small clearing. All around them were tall, strong, and sound spruce-trees, so there was no danger that any of them would break and topple over them if the fury of the gale should increase. Mason and Grayson had hauled to the camp an ample supply of fire-wood, and Angus had prepared a roomy spruce-bough shelter, which gave excellent protection against the thickly falling snow. A roaring fire was blazing in front of the shelter, and when the snow-flakes hit its licking flames they died with a sharp hiss. The

dogs were rolled up under the individual tree to which each was chained, already sleeping the sleep of exhaustion. There was no water near by, so they had to melt snow in a big pot for their cooking. It was a cosy, comfortable camp, and the wind, which howled and shrieked through the tree-tops over them, only made it appear still cosier.

"How long is this going to last, do you think?" asked Grayson, as they were lying comfortably stretched out in their spruce-bower, waiting for the snow to melt in the pot, so that Angus could begin his cooking.

"Two or three days, me guess. Perhaps more," answered Angus. "Goin' to make us late gettin' to Narrows. Have to break trails over again."

"Well, I'm glad I'm well out of that blizzard," declared Grayson. "I've heard some of the boys talk about blizzards, but I never believed they were quite as bad as this. I've gained a strong and lasting respect for them, thank you."

"Gosh. We darn lucky," commented Angus. "You go eight, ten miles through blizzard like this, an' you know somethin'. You bet!"

"Thank you. That mile or so we ploughed through it was quite enough for this baby," grinned Grayson. "Though with a little training I suppose I could stand some more of it. I suppose it's no use going on till this gentle little zephyr has blown itself out? Seems all right to travel in here among the timber."

"Oh, it would be all right if the trail was passing through timber all the way," said Mason. "But a few miles ahead we have to cross some more open muskegs and lakes, like those we have just left. And with a roaring blizzard blowing, and the trails blotted out with snow, we should be hopelessly lost after a few miles. And when you get lost in a blizzard in open country up here, you stay lost, my angel-chee-ild. You stay most decidedly and effectively lost. And take it from me, if you aren't born with a horse-shoe in one hand and a rabbit's foot in the other, you'll stay lost for ever and ever, amen! No. In a blizzard like this you have to stay put and kick your heels. And boy, oh, boy! Won't we have some trail-breaking to do when we start again. Lucky we are three to take turn and turn

about. You'll do some tall cussing, swearing, and sweating yet, before we reach Beaver Narrows, Grayson. But in the meantime both we and the dogs will be able to have a good rest, and will have a chance of fortifying our tissues for what is to come. The North certainly teaches a man to become a philosopher," he ended with a grin, as he wriggled himself into a more comfortable position.

CHAPTER VII

THE gale howled with unabating fury during the following day, and part of the next, while the snow continued to fall heavily. But towards evening of the third day the wind seemed to grow tired of its wild antics, and began to calm down. The snow-fall grew gradually lighter, and overhead the moon occasionally peeped out through rifts in the tossed mass of drifting clouds.

The following morning Mason and his companions were early astir. The day was calm. The moon had dipped below the horizon, but the sparkling stars overhead gave promise of a clear day. Breakfast was disposed of in a hurry, the sleighs were packed, the dogs were put into their harness, and they were away while the dawn was still grey.

Mason and Angus walked ahead, breaking trail through the deep snow with the short, narrow snow-shoes used specifically for this purpose. Grayson followed with the two dog-teams. By having two breaking trail they were able to make fairly good time, though their progress was mournfully slow compared to their former speed over the hard, firm sleigh-trails.

After a few miles Mason dropped back, and Grayson took his place. Later Mason changed places with Angus. And so they continued mile after mile. By changing frequently the exhausting toil of trail-breaking was made considerably easier; but even so Grayson found it a torturing experience. As he ploughed through the deep snow on his snow-shoes, the muscles in his legs, which were unaccustomed to the constant high-stepping motion, began to ache from strain. The back of his ankles as well as his insteps began to develop shooting, agonizing pains. There were times when each forward step was an excruciating torture, when he almost

prayed for some excuse to get a respite, if only for a few minutes. But he knew his companions were watching him, and his pride forbade him to give any signs of distress. So he clenched his teeth firmly, and kept doggedly on, till it was his turn to be relieved.

Across the open muskegs and lakes, which the gale had swept free of loose snow, the going was easier than through the woods, where the snow was piled high over the trail. And they made fairly good time over these tracts. But to get to these open spaces they had to break way through mountainous drifts of loose snow, which the wind had piled up against the timber on the windward side.

Their short rest at noon was a relief to all. While Angus busied himself by the fire to "throw together a bite", as he expressed it, Grayson flopped down on the spruce-mat they had prepared, and began to massage his aching muscles.

"Feeling pretty sore and stiff?" asked Mason with a sympathetic smile.

"So-so," grunted Grayson.

"The aches will gradually disappear as you get more used to the small snow-shoes, and your muscles get loosened up," consoled the corporal.

"I expect one will get used to everything in time, as the man said when he was about to be hung," observed Grayson lugubriously. "How far away did you say Beaver Narrows was?"

"Not so far. But with this darn trail-breaking and snail's pace I'm afraid it will take us still about four days to get there."

"Four days of this!" groaned Grayson. "Well, write to my people and tell them I died game, and that I thought of them at the last."

"Oh, rather," grinned Mason. "And we'll erect a nice monument over your grave, with a pair of crossed snow-shoes as symbolic ornamentation."

"No. No snow-shoes!" protested the dying hero firmly. "If you stick a pair of those accursed instruments of torture on my headstone I shouldn't be able to rest in peace. I should feel like legging it as far away from them as I possibly could."

"You stick tin o' sausings on grave," broke in Angus, grinning at them. "That keep him fine an' peaceful. Never saw worse fellow for can' sausings in all my life."

"You said it, Angus," laughed Mason. "An appropriate and fitting memorial for our Mr. Grayson. But don't worry, young fella-me-lad. You won't die this trip. You've really been doing fine to-day. I remember the first time I was breaking trail. Gosh, I was so full of pains and aches that I felt like sitting right down in the snow and weeping. We've all been through it. And it certainly is a bit of a nasty experience at first."

"That's a rather loose way of describing the hellish, refined torture," observed Grayson. "But let that pass. Say, did you include to-day in the four days of trail-breaking we still have to face?"

"Oh, yes."

"Thanks for them kind and encouraging words, Master. They were as music to my ears. Chopin's funeral march, for choice. Say, Angus. What about that grub you were boasting about? The aches are beginning to spread to my tummy."

"Sure. You always think o' tummy. But soon ready now."

Mason was chuckling to himself. Grayson certainly could play the game. He had begun to like him better and better as the days on the trail passed, and he had found him a most satisfying trail-companion. He eagerly tried to learn all tricks and wrinkles of sleigh-travel. He was never afraid to ask questions, and he took all the vicissitudes of the journey with good humour. Mason was wont to say, that one could always find out a man's true value when he was in his cups or when he was up in the North. And measured by this simple formula, Grayson was well up in the scale.

Mason knew from old experience what Grayson had really gone through that morning, and he admired greatly the grit with which he had stuck it out, and the light spirit with which he touched on his gruelling experiences. It would not have been the least unnatural or surprising if the youngster had felt rather despondent and a little

discouraged. Angus later, and privately, confided the same sentiments to Mason's ear. And they both agreed that Grayson was a fellow "who'd do to take the trail with", the final accolade bestowed on the tenderfoot in the North who's been tried and not been found wanting.

They pushed steadily forward all that day, and when they pitched their camp that night Angus estimated that they had come about fifteen or twenty miles. Not a bad result, considering all the trail-breaking they had had to do. They all rolled into their bedding immediately after supper, too exhausted to enjoy a chat by the fire.

The following morning they were again early astir, and continued their plodding way. To his pleasant surprise Grayson found, once they had got properly started, that after the night's rest the task of trail-breaking had become less burdensome. Some of the worst pains and aches had disappeared, though he still suffered plenty of discomfort. But at least it had become more bearable.

The next day brought an agreeable change in their fortunes. In the afternoon they met two Indians with a dog-team, who had left Beaver Narrows after the blizzard. The meeting was a pleasant surprise to both parties. Mason's party now had a broken trail ahead of them all the way up to the Narrows, while the Indians on their side were presented with about fifty miles of broken trail. And, perhaps, with a bit of further luck, the two Indians might meet another dog- or horse-team from the South before the fifty miles had been exhausted. So the meeting was decidedly a happy one. The only members of the two parties who did not seem to appreciate the good fortune which had come to them were the dogs. The teams from Portage Bend snarled at their colleagues from the North, and generally made known the low opinion they had of them. They also growled what they would do to them if given half a chance. And the dogs from Beaver Narrows, though in hopeless minority, bristled, and answered in kind. So just then there was no opportunity to pass lengthy votes of gratitude and esteem between the humans. The snarling, snapping, growling dog-teams had to be led carefully and watchfully past each other to prevent a battle royal. But this delicate

task was finally executed with full success, to the bitter disappointment of the dogs.

As soon as all danger of assault, battery, and ensuing chaos had been eliminated, Mason walked over to the two Indians to ask for news from Beaver Narrows. They told him that so far there had been no further outbreak on the part of the mad trapper. A few people had been cautiously spying on him from time to time, but he seemed to be quietly going about his business of attending to his traps. Of his partner no sign had been discovered, so nobody knew what had happened to him. But the people around the Narrows had been in a constant state of terror, afraid that Wilson might break out any day, and start wholesale slaughter. So the arrival of the police-patrol would be a source of great relief.

But none of the Indians could give any information whatever about Warner or his companion.

The rest of the journey up to Beaver Narrows was almost in the nature of a pleasure-jault to the three travelers after the days of hard trail-breaking. It was just before noon on the following day when they guided their dog-teams across the small Lower Beaver Lake and into the Narrows, from which the settlement took its name. The Narrows is actually a channel, about a half-mile wide, which winds through the hills and forests from the large Beaver Lake to the north down to Lower Beaver Lake. About half-way between the two lakes, on a wide, wooded plateau, which extends on both sides of the channel, is situated the small settlement of Beaver Narrows. On the right, or west bank, are the white buildings of the Hudson's Bay Company's trading-post, with a cluster of log-cabins and shacks around it. On the opposite bank lie the grey-blue buildings of the rival fur company, Revillion Freres Trading Company, also surrounded by scattered huts. The buildings of these strong competitors for the fur trade seem to glare pugnaciously and challengingly at each other across the Narrows.

When Mason's caravan pulled up to the Hudson's Bay Company's post, they found Bill Jennings outside to receive them. In fact, he had been shouting enthusiastic welcomes to them from the time they had come within

hailing distance down on the ice of the channel. He had been dancing around outside the store with pleasure, excitement, and from cold ever since a fellow with a pair of sharp eyes had discovered the approaching teams from the store window, when they were still far down in the Narrows, and had given the alarm.

"Old Angus, by all that's holy!" shouted Jennings, pumping Angus's hand, and patting him on the back. "Good to see you up here again, old laddie. Just like the good old days. Gosh, it's two years since you were up here last. That time when Wess, Mason, and you were up to gather in that fellow Charley Crow. How are you, old son? And why didn't you bring Wess along?"

"Tried to," grinned Angus. "But said too busy. Always pushin' papers aroun' in office, callin' it work. Wess sure about gone to dogs, since promoted Inspector."

"Don't doubt it," laughed Jennings. "And how are you, Mason?" he continued, transferring his pumping and thumping operations to that individual. "Still going strong, and that sort of thing? And welcome to you too"—he turned to Grayson—"though I don't know your name yet."

"This is Constable Grayson," introduced Mason.

"Welcome to our city, Grayson. And don't get lost in our numerous streets and avenues. You a new man in the Police?"

"No. But I'm new to this part of the country," answered Grayson with a smile.

"Bet those old sourdoughs made you hump yourself, coming up here. You must have been travelling some fast to be here already."

"Well, yes. I had to hustle considerably to keep up with them," admitted Grayson.

"I bet you had. And old Baptiste made good time down, I expect?"

"Rather. I think he broke the record for the trip," said Mason.

"Fine. Well here you are and . . ." He broke off and looked over the Narrows. "Look at that, you fellows," he chuckled, pointing to a dog-team that came racing across the channel with a lone man in the sleigh.

"There's Fred coming now. Guess he saw you arrive, and is coming over to see if you've got any mail for him." "Fred", it must be explained, was Fred Henshaw, the manager of the Revillion post.

"Yes. We've got a bag of mail for Henshaw, and one for you," said Mason. "Grayson routed the postmaster out at eleven o'clock the night before we left, to get it."

"Good boy. And say," continued Jennings confidentially, looking speculatively from one sleigh to the other, "a case marked with the name of a rather famous firm of Scotch distillers should have arrived for me at Portage Bend before you fellows left. You didn't bring it along by any chance?" He looked hopefully at Mason.

"Well, now you mention it, I seem to remember there was a case for you at the Barracks," said Mason casually, as if the matter was of little or no interest. "I expect Baptiste will bring it along when he returns."

Jennings groaned, and glared at him.

"You are a hell of a pal, you are, Mason!" he exploded. "Here's Christmas and New Year come and gone, and me and Fred down to the last few fingers of the last bottle. And then you come up here and leave the fresh supply behind! Ain't you ashamed of yourself? Don't you know that whisky is the most useful, and the only, medicine we've got up here? What's going to happen if we catch a chill or a cold, or something nasty like that, without whisky to go with it? We'll probably die from pneumonia or something, and our death will be at your door. Gosh, it's enough to make a man lose his faith in human na . . ."

He stopped and wheeled quickly when he heard a snicker behind him. He was just in time to catch a wide grin on Angus's face. He must have read something in that grin, for his wrathful brow immediately cleared.

"So you were only pulling my leg, you young devil," he said to Mason, who was now frankly laughing. "Gosh. You sure had me going. I got a whale of a shock for the minute."

"Yes. You looked as if you were on the verge of an apoplectic fit," chuckled Mason. "There are two cases

on Angus's sleigh. Yours, and one for Fred Henshaw, that came in at the same time. And Angus has got a letter for you from Mrs. Weston."

"Good scout!" shouted Jennings, once more his usual sunny self. "That sounds more like it. But come up to the house and get unpacked, and then we'll have plenty big pow-wow."

Fred Henshaw soon joined them, and lent a hand with the unpacking and unharnessing, so it wasn't long before they were comfortably installed in Bill Jennings's roomy quarters.

Jennings and Henshaw clamoured avidly for news from "outside", and the three new arrivals were kept busy feeding their voracity. And when this source had run dry at last, the two excused themselves and began eagerly to go through their mail, picking out the personal letters, which they at once greedily perused.

It was not till after they had disposed of a substantial lunch that Mason got a chance to get down to business. He first asked Jennings if there had been any fresh developments in the matter of the mad trapper, Wilson, since he had dispatched his letter.

"Nope. I'm happy to say that nothing has happened so far," said Jennings. "I've had some men spying on him from time to time, to see what he was up to. But he seems to be leading the peaceful, humdrum life of the ordinary trapper. He goes out fairly regularly to attend to his traps. But he's quite cuckoo, all right. One of my fellows happened to watch him from a distance, once he found a fox in one of his traps. The fox was still alive. Dam' if Wilson didn't kneel right down in the snow in front of the fox and pray, before he killed the critter! Perhaps he thought that would make it so much jollier for the fox. But he always has his rifle in his hand, wherever he goes, and he peers suspiciously ahead of him and around him. My men also tell me that his mouth is constantly moving, as if he's muttering to himself. Perhaps he's praying to the good Lord to send him a target for his rifle, or something jolly like that."

"But what about this partner of his? Has anybody found out yet whether he's alive or dead?"

"Not definitely. But he's quite disappeared, and there is only one conclusion to draw from that. And then, of course, Wilson practically told Baptiste that he'd killed Brent."

"But what's he done with the body?" asked Mason with knitted brows. "He surely can't have it in his cabin with him?"

"Wilson has two cabins at his camp. The regular cabin, and a shack for stores. And he may keep the body in the latter. I had a man scout around Wilson's camp one day when its owner was out on the trap-line. But my scout didn't find out much. Both the cabins were heavily padlocked. My fellow had a peep into the living-shack through the window, but he could see no corpse there. Then he tried the other shack. That has no windows, so he pried some of the caulking out from between a couple of logs with his knife to make a peep-hole; but it was so dark inside, he couldn't see what was there. And he didn't dare monkey around too much for fear Wilson should discover somebody had been prying, and go on the rampage. He also circled around the camp to see if Wilson should have cached the body in some tree; but there was no sign of it anywhere."

"He might have buried it in the snow."

"Well, if he has, it must be far away from his camp and trap-line. I've had several fellows out to look for signs around his camp and along his trap-line. You know that if a body is buried in the snow, wild animals would soon find their way to it, and there would be tracks leading towards it from all directions. But my men found no signs at all. So if there is a body, I think it will be found in the store-house."

"But why would Wilson keep the body in the store-house, where he must stumble over it every time he goes in to get anything from there?" asked Mason. "It seems too eerie and spooky to be right."

"Whoever can fathom the ideas which pass through a diseased mind?" asked Jennings, gravely and reflectively. "Perhaps he feels he owes the body some care and reverence since he's bereft it of life. Or he may have some other obscure reason. The man is utterly and entirely out

of his mind. I didn't quite finish the story of the man I sent up to scout around Wilson's camp. This fellow knew that Wilson is running three short trap-lines, and that he always returns to his camp before nightfall. So he decided to wait and see what would happen if Wilson discovered his tracks. So he watched the camp from a ridge, hidden behind some brush.

"About three o'clock Wilson returned, and he certainly discovered my fellow's tracks. He halted his dogs at the edge of the clearing, and started walking around with his nose nearly to the ground. He followed the spy's tracks to the window in the shack, and from there over to the store-house. But my fellow had repaired the small damage he had done to the caulking, so Wilson couldn't see what the fellow had been up to. However, from the store-house he followed the tracks to the edge of the clearing, and my man held himself in readiness to beat a hasty retreat in case Wilson intended to follow up the tracks farther. He wasn't farther away than he could see Wilson's face, and he said that if ever a face showed the fury of hell, Wilson's was it. But Wilson stopped at the edge of the clearing. There he lifted his hands, one hand still clutching his rifle, and shook them wildly in the air. His face was turned upwards towards the sky, and he cried something my fellow couldn't hear. Then suddenly he knelt down, folded his hands around his cannon, and prayed. At least my man said it looked as if he prayed. Then he got to his feet again, and once more he waved his hands wildly in the air, while he was shouting something. Then he turned back to his dogs, drove them into camp, and unharnessed them. After that he unlocked the door of his shack and entered, and my scout came away rather hurriedly. He was afraid that Wilson still might take it into his head to follow up his tracks, and after what he had seen, the last thing in the world he wanted was to have Wilson stalking him. So as you see, this Wilson seems to be a pleasant, sociable cuss in his present mood. Can't see how you're going to get him, before some damage has been done to some of you."

"Oh, we'll have to resort to strategy, as Inspector Weston always says," grinned Mason, unmoved. "Does

he always take his dogs with him, when he goes out on the line? "

" Yep. As far as I know he does."

" Well, I think we might as well take a trip up to his camp right away and have a look at things," observed Mason. " I suppose he'll be in his shack by the time we get there, seeing he apparently returns fairly early in the afternoon from his trap-line."

" Good Lord. You don't mean to say that you intend to walk right in on him, after what I've told you? " asked Jennings, staring goggle-eyed at Mason.

" Lord, no! I only want to have a look at his camp from a discreet distance, and survey the enemy's base, as it were. It's only about ten miles up to his camp, I understand? "

" About that."

" Any sleigh-trails leading up that way? "

" Sure. There's a good trail passing within a couple of miles of Wilson's camp. And I know at least three parties have been over that trail after the blizzard, so it will be in fine shape. But for the trip from the trail to the camp you'll have to use snow-shoes. There'll be no trail at all."

" Right. Can you get us a guide to take us up there? "

" Oh, sure. I'd go myself; but I'm going to be busy. To tell you the truth, I got a bunch of ptarmigans a few days ago, and I'm going to give you a treat to-night," he explained with a grin. " But as old Mulberry-bush, my dusky housekeeper, you know, is no good at fancy cooking, I shall have to cook myself. But what about you, Fred? " he asked Henshaw. " You know Wilson's camp. What about you going along with them? "

" Oh, sure. I'll go. But on one condition."

" What's that? "

" That you invite me to supper."

" Oh, shut up, you mutt. You knew you were invited anyhow. I have to feed you now and then to keep you alive. Though why you should be kept alive, Lord only knows."

" Don't start wrangling, you two," counselled Mason, getting up. " Come on, fellows. We'll have to hustle to

get up there before dusk. I want to have this business over and done with as soon as possible, as I have some other business to attend to up here. I'll have a pow-wow with you, Bill, and you, Henshaw, after I get back about that. Listen, we'd better take two teams and sleighs, two fellows on each. Then we'll do the trip in no time."

"Take my team and Fred's," advised Jennings. "Our dogs are quite fresh, so you can travel fast."

"Thanks. We will. And lend me those powerful field-glasses of yours, Bill. I want to have a good look at that camp. I have a sort of budding idea, and I want to see if it can be used."

"Right. I'll go get the glasses. But be dam' careful with them. I got them from Westons for Christmas a few years ago, and I'll be real sore if anything happens to them."

"Oh, we'll look after them all right," grinned Mason.

About two hours later the four men were standing on the top of a ridge a short quarter-mile south of Wilson's camp, and the camp itself lay in plain view before them. It was situated in a hollow between low, spruce-clad hills. The sun was hanging low on the western horizon, but the shadows, which were creeping across the clearing from the forest, had not yet reached the two cabins.

Mason laid himself flat over a convenient boulder, and put the glasses to his eyes. The glasses were so powerful that even the smallest details of the two buildings stood out clearly. Smoke was pouring out of the iron stove-pipe sticking out through the roof of the main shack, and dogs were chained to trees around the clearing. So obviously Wilson was at home. It was a peaceful, quiet, and picturesque scene, that seemed very remote from any sort of tragedy or violence, indeed.

After a rather lengthy and careful study of the camp, Mason finally removed the glasses from his eyes and stood up, a satisfied smile on his face.

"Let's start back," he said. "I've seen all I wanted to see."

"You think your idea will work?" asked Henshaw.

"I think so."

"Well, what is it?"

"I'll tell you all about it when we get back. Too cold to have a council of war here. Come on, chaps."

When they got back to Bill Jennings's house, their host appeared from the kitchen, looking hot, red, somewhat disorganized, but very cheerful.

"Well, the birds are all in the oven, boys," he announced proudly. "They are all fixed up scientifically, and I'm going to make a grand gravy. I'm an expert on gravies. Mulberry-bush is now keeping an eye on the stove. Guess she can do that much without mussing things up," he added a little sceptically.

Mulberry-bush, whose name was really something quite different, was an elderly Indian woman, who had been housekeeper and maid-of-all-work to Jennings almost from the first day he had arrived at the Narrows. Jennings called her Mulberry-bush, because he claimed the name fitted her. But in spite of her years of service and experience she had never developed into a fair cook. She could only cook the most ordinary and simple dishes of the backwoods. And as she could not read, a cookery-book would not have added to her education.

"Well, how did you fellows make out?" continued Jennings. "Was his nibs home? And did you see him at all?"

"Yes. He was home all right. But we didn't see him," answered Mason. "Nor did we leave our calling cards."

"I know you didn't, seeing you are all here," grinned Jennings. "What about that idea of yours. Did it sprout?"

"I think so."

"Good. Tell your uncle all about it."

"In a minute. But I want to ask you a few questions first. Do you happen to know Joe Warner, a prospector who's been roaming this . . . ?"

"Do I know Joe Warner!" interrupted Jennings. "Gosh, I've known that old sourdough for years and years. Why?"

"Have you seen him up here this winter? Or have you heard of any who's seen him?"

"Now what's the idea?" asked Jennings suspiciously.

"Don't tell me that you fellows think you have got anything on Joe. Shucks, he's the straightest, squarest . . ."

"Hold your hosses, Bill!" laughed Mason. "I know all that by heart. No. He's not wanted, but he's missing." And he gave a brief outline of the case. "Are you sure he hasn't been around here?"

"Well, I haven't seen him here this winter. And I'm sure I would have heard about it if anybody had seen him. No. I feel pretty sure he hasn't been up this far. But, gosh. I wouldn't worry about that old-timer. What he doesn't know about the North isn't worth knowing. Old Joe can take care of himself, if anybody can."

"Quite so. But the fact remains that he promised his daughter to be home over a month ago, and he's not yet arrived. At least he hadn't before we left. And according to Miss Warner, Joe is rather punctilious in such matters."

"Yes. That's quite true," observed Jennings thoughtfully. "Joe has a reputation for always sticking strictly to given promises. But even so. . . . Sure he was heading up this way?"

"Yes. I came across a fellow on the way up who'd seen Warner and his companion heading in this direction. But of course they may have left the main trail before they got as far as this."

"Yes. I guess that's what they have done. I'm quite sure they've not gone through here, or else somebody would have seen them. We keep pretty close tabs on those who pass. Nothing much else to do up here during the winter months," explained Jennings with a grin. "But some of the trappers and Indians may have seen them, even so. I'll make a few inquiries. They all know Joe up here. Personally I haven't seen him since last summer."

"Oh, he was up here then, was he?" asked Mason with quickening interest. "Where was he heading for when he left?"

"Haven't the faintest idea. You know yourself that those old prospectors are as secretive as the Sphinx itself. He did tell me he intended to prospect in the hills up around Beaver Lake, and he started up the Narrows for

the lake when he left. But where he finished up I don't know. Anyhow, he didn't come back this way."

"Seems to me I'll have a heck of a job, locating him," sighed Mason ruefully. "Oh, well. I shall be able to pick up his trail somewhere, I expect. Just at present we've got Mr. Wilson to worry about."

"Quite so. And now you tell us what your scheme is for overpowering and securing said Mr. Wilson," remarked Jennings. "But wait," he continued, jumping to his feet. "First I'm going to get you fellows a drink. Sorry we don't run to soda-water up here, but according to the experts, water is the scientific, additional beverage to go with whisky. It's supposed to bring out the flavour better, and that sort of thing. So I'll get you a really scientific drink."

After Jennings had discharged his duties as butler, he sank down in a chair, and asked Mason to parade his great idea for their joint inspection.

"It'll just serve to fill in the time till the birds are ready," he explained. "I just had a peek at them, and they're doing very nicely. And the smell! Yum, yum!"

"Hey! Don't start anything like that to get our minds off the business in hand," complained Henshaw. "I can about smell those birds in here. Get going, Corporal, before Bill gets any more chance to get our imaginations worked up."

"Well, my scheme is rather simple," began Mason. "So simple, in fact, that it ought to work. I saw through the glasses that the door is locked with hasp and staple and padlock. My idea is to wrench off one end of the hasp on the door to the main shack while Wilson is away. That will open the door. Then Grayson and I will hide inside the shack, while Angus hammers the hasp in place again. When Wilson returns and opens the door, which opens outward, I noticed, Grayson and I will be crouching beside the wall on each side of the doorway. As soon as he steps inside, we'll jump him. And as he will be taken completely by surprise, it ought to be a fairly easy job to overpower him and slip the handcuffs on him before any of us is hurt."

"That sure soun's all right," chuckled Angus. "You

sure have learn' somethin' from Wess, Mason. Wess couldn't make better scheme himself."

"Yes. It sounds quite good," agreed Jennings. "But these lunatics are as wary as foxes. He may notice the scratches on the door where you work the hasp loose, and he may become suspicious."

"I've thought of that," said Mason. "But we'll take along some dust, and Angus can rub that into the fresh scratches after he's replaced the hasp again. Then they wouldn't be noticeable. I'm sure you have plenty around your store-houses, Bill," he added with a grin.

"Sure. Tons of it, I guess," laughed Jennings. "And you're welcome to all of it. I shan't miss it."

"Sure. That'll be fine," broke in Angus. "Then me wipe out our tracks careful with brush. Then after I tramp aroun' camp on my snow-shoes, an' make tracks as if me been nosin' aroun', an' then go away. After what your man say, Bill, he'll sure be so dam' work up when he sees them tracks, that he won't never notice nothing wrong with door. An' I'll do good job o' it. Scheme ought to work like clock."

"Well, it'd better, or else good-bye to Mason and Grayson!" remarked Jennings ominously. "If that fellow gets wise, that somebody is concealed inside that cabin, he'll soon pot you with his rifle through the window."

"Don't be a calamity-howler, Bill," remonstrated Henshaw. "I think the scheme sounds sweet and lovely. Say, I'm going along up with you. And Angus and I can keep watch from the ridge where we were to-day, and as soon as we see Wilson enter the shack, we'll rush up and lend a hand."

"And I'm going too," said Jennings. "Which makes it unanimous. When do we go?"

"To-morrow," answered Mason. "I suppose he'll go out on his trap-line as usual. If he doesn't, we'll have to wait till he does. I want to have this thing off my hands as soon as possible, so I can start to look around for Warner in earnest. No use starting too early in the morning. We want him to be well out of the way before we arrive at his camp. We'll time ourselves so we get there an hour or so before noon. That'll leave us ample time for our prepara-

tions, and then we shan't have such a long time to wait. Though I think it will be long enough. You'll have to lend us some tools, Bill. A couple of hammers, a cold chisel or two, or anything else that can be used as jemmies."

"Sure. I've got plenty of that sort of stuff. But excuse me. I must go out and see how everything is going in the kitchen. This is the biggest occasion we've had for a long time, so I have to make sure that everything is just right." He grinned around at them all, and disappeared kitchenward.

For the remainder of that day all "shop" was banished. They all gave themselves up entirely to social amenities. Jennings's ptarmigans proved a tremendous success. And after them followed pies, cakes, and preserved fruit in such an abundance that those present began to suspect that Jennings's perpetual complaint, that he was unable to obtain decent meals at Beaver Narrows, must be founded more on fancy than fact.

Later in the evening quite a crowd of trappers and natives came trooping along, to hear all the news the new arrivals could impart. The whole settlement had known of their arrival almost as soon as it happened. The news had even penetrated to the Indian Reserve with incredible speed, although it was more than two miles away, up on the shore of Beaver Lake.

There was a problem involved with the visitors, which took tactful handling. Some of them were Treaty Indians, and as such debarred by law from enjoying alcoholic beverages. On the other hand, there were many who were eligible and worthy to taste the fluid that "biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder". But Jennings could not serve the latter a drink in front of the ineligible without hurting feelings. So he solved the problem neatly by serving coffee, and sandwiches, and cakes, and whatnot to all in one room. And the eligibles were one by one, on some pretext or other, taken into another room, where the forbidden fruit was administered. Of course, the ineligible understood this by-play perfectly, but they appreciated Jennings's tact, and simulated a wooden non-comprehension. So everyone was happy, and a satisfactory time was had by all till late into the evening.

CHAPTER VIII

THEY were all up early the following morning, in spite of the preceding evening's festivities. And a little after nine o'clock the whole party started for Wilson's camp. They left the one dog-team they had taken with them down on the trail, and went forward on their snow-shoes to their observation-post of the preceding day. As soon as they saw the camp they knew it was deserted. No smoke came up from the stove-pipe, and the dogs and the dog-sleigh had gone.

Mason, Angus, and Grayson immediately proceeded to the camp, while Jennings and Henshaw returned to the trail to bring their dog-team up to the close vicinity of the ridge.

Mason and his companions had no trouble whatever in wrenching loose one end of the hasp, and it was only a matter of minutes before they were inside the cabin.

The one room it contained was surprisingly clean and tidy. It held a cooking-stove in one corner, a home-made table, and two chairs, and two bunks. One of the bunks was quite empty and devoid of bedding. The other had the bedding neatly made up. On nails around the walls hung various articles of clothing and equipment, and around the cooking-stove hung pots and pans, as well as several stretchers for fur.

On the table lay an open Bible. Mason walked over to have a look at it. It was open at the "Book of Revelations".

"Just what he would be studying," he muttered to the others. "Well. Here we are. And no sign of his partner. Even his bedding is gone. Some of the clothes and things may be his, of course. But there's no way of telling. I should like to break into that store-house to see what's

there, but we had better wait till we have subdued Wilson. Don't like to muck around too much, or his suspicion is sure to be aroused. Well, Angus, you'd better beat it, and do your stuff. And see you make a real good job of it, so there won't be any hitch."

"Me make such fine job that he sure won't guess nothin', nohow," assured Angus with a grin. "Hope you guys won't freeze to death while waitin'. Me'n Bill an' Fred's goin' to have good fire goin', where it can't be spotted. Sorry you fellows can't come to visit with us, an' warm yourselves."

"Shut up, Angus!" growled Mason. "And don't rub it in. It'll be as cold as in an ice-cellar in here soon. Hope that fellow won't be long. Chuck us in our snowshoes, Angus."

"Here they are. Want us to bring over some hot coffee by'n-by?" asked their tormentor.

"Get out before there is another murder around here!" growled Mason threateningly. And with an encouraging and paternal grin Angus walked out and closed the door behind him.

Outside he quickly hammered the staple into place again. Then he removed one of his mittens, and fished a paper bag out of his pocket. This contained a choice collection of dust from the accumulation of years around the Hudson's Bay post.

Angus moistened one finger, dipped it into the bag, and rubbed the dust he fished out into the fresh scratches on the wood-work and on the parts of the metal which had become shiny where chisel and hammer had struck them. The moist dust froze immediately, and adhered closely wherever it was applied. Angus stepped back from time to time and inspected his handiwork critically, like an artist engaged on a masterpiece. Though Angus's present work was far more important than any an artist had ever produced. Two men's lives probably depended on how well he executed his task.

After each inspection he added a few touches here and there. When he had at last got it fixed to his satisfaction, he stood back and surveyed the finished product with a pleased and proud grin. It would take a more than usually

alert observer to discover that the fastenings of the door had ever been tampered with in any way.

This job disposed of to his entire satisfaction, he set to work with some spruce-brush to remove their snow-shoe tracks. This was a delicate operation. It had to be done so deftly that no discernible trace was left of the sweeping. But Angus was an adept at this sort of thing, and he made an exceedingly good job of it.

Next he donned his snow-shoes at the edge of the clearing, where they had originally entered, and then he walked boldly up to the door of the cabin, stepping from choice over the ground he had treated with his improvised brush. Arrived at the cabin-door he rattled the padlock, taking care that the lock was twisted into another position when he let go of it. It would be the natural thing for a spy to do to test the lock, and Angus was very thorough in his methods. To do the natural and normal thing, when running a bluff, is almost the most effective way of lulling suspicion, was one of Angus's pet axioms. He knew Wilson would notice that the lock had been tested, but he would also see that it was still intact, so he would therefore not pay closer attention to the fastenings.

From the door Angus wandered around the corner of the building to the window, where he grinned in at the two imprisoned officers. After having twiddled his fingers to them he plodded over to the store-house, where he also rattled the lock. Then he circled the building, stopping here and there where chinks between the logs would probably tempt a prying man to attempt a peep inside, and after he had walked around the whole building he walked out of the clearing at the same place he had entered. From there he walked straight back to Jennings and Henshaw.

The time passed slowly for the two inside the cabin. At first they examined everything within to see if they could discover any clue to what could have happened to Brent. But they discovered nothing of a sinister nature. In fact, everything within the cabin was exactly as in hundreds of other trappers' cabins, which Mason had visited. Only it was considerably tidier and cleaner than the majority.

"Doesn't look much like a murderer's den," he muttered to Grayson. "But then, of course, we can't call Wilson a murderer, even if he did kill his partner. If he's half as crazy as reports have it, he's certainly not responsible for whatever he does. Brrrr! It's getting cold in here, and I'm afraid it will be much colder before our man returns. Wish we could make a fire. Hell of a note to have to sit freezing in here with a stove and firewood all handy. Anyhow, we've got our caribou coats, and every little bit helps. Hope he won't be too long."

They spent the long hours as best they could. They huddled in a corner that was out of the range of sight from the window. They were not taking any chances on Wilson sneaking up to the window unexpectedly, and discovering them inside. Of course, the chance of such a contingency was really negligible, but, as Mason remarked, the trouble in dealing with a madman is that you always have to be prepared for the unexpected.

They tried to while the time away by telling stories in whispers, and Mason told of other queer experiences he had been through in the past up here in the backwoods. But even so time moved with maddening slowness. Occasionally they had to stand up to beat their arms together to speed up the blood-circulation, when the cold grew too penetrating. They had brought with them a couple of sandwiches each, and another few minutes were disposed of by munching them. With their frugal meal they drank water, which they found in a bucket near the stove. They had to break the ice on the surface of the water each time they wanted a drink. Grayson in particular found this whole experience peculiarly cold, dreary, and cheerless. It lacked entirely the dash and verve which he considered ought to be the key-note of police-work. He confided his speculation to Mason, who explained with a broad grin that about ninety-nine per cent of police-work is patient waiting and watchfulness, while the odd per cent represents the dash and verve Grayson seemed to be yearning for. An observation which made Grayson feel glummer and more forlorn than ever.

It must have been around half-past three, with dusk beginning to pervade the shack, when Mason suddenly

held up his hand for silence. He thought he had heard a man's voice in the distance. They both listened breathlessly. Yes. Now they both heard it, a faint "Mush!" A dog-driver shouting to his dogs some distance away.

"He's coming. Now you'll soon get your spot of dash and whatnot," whispered Mason with a grin. "We have to stick here in the corner for the time being," he continued. "He's sure to follow Angus's tracks around the clearing, and he may take a peep in through the window. As soon as we hear him unharness his dogs, we'll take up our positions on either side of the door. Flatten yourself against the wall as well as you can. Luckily it's beginning to be fairly dark in here, so he won't see much coming from the outside. Keep your handcuffs ready. As soon as he steps into the room I'll jump him, and you'll have to get the handcuffs on him somehow while I'm tackling him. And we'll have to remove our caribou coats before we go into action. They'll only hamper us if there is a real rough-house. All understood?"

Grayson nodded. Now, with action just ahead, his face had brightened considerably.

Soon they could hear the tinkle of the little bells on the dog-harness, and at intervals a deep voice would boom: "Mush!" These shouts came with almost regular intervals and sounded quite automatic. The driver was obviously in no hurry, and only called to the dogs to keep their minds on their job.

At last the suddenly sharper and clearer jingle of the bells told the listener that the dog-team had emerged from the forest, and had entered the clearing. The dogs were almost up to the shack, when the driver shouted a sharp "Whoa!"

For a moment there was dead silence. Then suddenly the deep, booming voice broke wildly and passionately in on the stillness.

"O God in heaven!" it cried. "Why hast Thou not in Thy justice stopped the children of Satan from coming here to pester this Thy servant? O Lord! how long must I still suffer their sinful mockeries. When wilt Thou, who helped Thy chosen people to slay the Philistines, in Thy wisdom give me the sign to sally forth to

exterminate them all for Thy glory, O Lord? I can't wait much longer before I send them all back to the Master of Darkness, where they belong. Curse you all, you spawn of Satan!" The voice ended in almost a scream, and then suddenly fell silent, as if passion had overwhelmed him quite and left him speechless.

But after a short moment the listeners heard the snow creak under the man's moccasins outside, as he began to move around, obviously following Angus's tracks. Presently they heard him stop in front of the door, and test the lock. For a moment the hearts of the two officers were in their mouths. Would he discover that the fastenings had been tampered with? Would he enter at once, before they were ready to receive him? But evidently he found nothing to arouse his suspicions, and to their relief they heard him move away. They heard him pass along the wall to the window. They could hear him muttering fiercely to himself. It sounded like a jumble of words without meaning. He did not stop by the window, but passed right on, and his creaking steps and mutterings grew fainter in the direction of the store-house.

The two officers hugged their corner closely, almost afraid to breathe. The frozen, dead silence outside was only broken by the creaking steps of the madman, his mad, incoherent muttering, and the occasional tinkle of a dog-bell, when one of the dogs moved in his harness. Grayson shivered in spite of himself. He found the situation was becoming rather eerie, sinister, and weird, as he sat there in the gathering dusk, listening to those creaking steps, and those crazy mutterings, waiting for the madman to enter the shack. He realized now that they had to deal with a dangerous, homicidal maniac, and that it might be exceedingly perilous to tackle him. He felt a tingling, creepy feeling up his spine when he realized all this, though he silently upbraided himself for being a fool and a coward. He stole a look at Mason. The latter seemed grave, but quite composed and resolute, and the air of quiet confidence about him served to steady Grayson.

In the meantime they heard the madman's creaky steps again come nearer to the shack. They passed, and evi-

dently continued down to the point where Angus had entered and left the clearing. Then suddenly the man's voice again crashed on the stillness, like the roar of an enraged animal:

"You spawn of Satan! " it roared. "Show yourself once to me, and I shall send you back to your master in hell! O Lord in heaven! save me from these vile children of Satan, who come here to mock and persecute me. Help me, like you helped Thy chosen people in the past to confuse and overcome those who mocked and persecuted them. Help me, O Lord."

His voice gradually sank, and the two listeners in the cabin could no longer distinguish the words, but from the even, droning, sonorous rhythm of his voice they guessed that he was praying. Then followed a short flash of silence, and then his voice again rose to a roar, which awoke startled echoes in the silent woods around.

"God's curses go with you whoever you are, and wherever you go! May God curse you, your parents, your wife, your children, and all your family, and may the bread turn to ashes in your mouth, and may the work of your hands be thousandfold accursed! "

After this impious outburst he suddenly fell abruptly silent, and a few moments after the two listeners heard the harness-bells tinkle sharply as he began to unharness the dogs.

Mason nudged Grayson quietly with his elbow, and they both quickly wrenched off their fur coats. Then they rose noiselessly to their feet, and edged as quietly as they could along the wall to their respective positions on either side of the doorway. There they crouched and waited tensely.

After what seemed another endless wait, but what was in reality only a few minutes, they heard steps approaching the door. They both froze in their positions, hardly daring to breathe.

The key rattled in the padlock, the hasp squeaked as it was wrenched open, and then the frost-covered hinges of the door began to creak and whine. Wilson was pulling the door open. He had obviously no suspicion of anything being wrong inside, for he strode boldly and un-

hesitatingly in as soon as the door had opened wide enough. He carried his rifle in his hand.

He had only taken one step past the threshold when Mason hurled himself at his back, and flung his arms about him, penning his arms to his side. Wilson uttered one startled yell, tried to free himself from those clinging arms by hurling himself forward, but lost his balance. He crashed to the floor with Mason hanging grimly and doggedly on. The rifle was knocked out of Wilson's hand, and clattered on the floor-boards.

The fall must have stunned Wilson for a moment, because he lay still long enough for Grayson to be able to jump in and snap the handcuffs on his wrists. But the next moment he came to life. With a terrible animal scream he began to thresh, toss, and heave, trying frantically to break away from Mason, who was tossed this way and that. But the latter held tenaciously on, and struggled with all his might to pin the madman to the floor.

"Quick, Grayson!" he panted. "Hang on to his legs. Don't let him break away, for God's sake!"

Grayson immediately dropped on to the struggling mass, and threw his whole weight on the kicking, threshing legs. But even so they had all they could do to handle him. He seemed to be invested with superhuman strength. He heaved, twisted, and strained, and several times he almost succeeded in throwing one or the other of the officers off. But they managed to hang on. Wilson screamed and cursed, and saliva flowed out of his mouth and down his beard. Doggedly and grimly the two policemen wrestled with him. Even though he was handcuffed, he would still be dangerous if he once managed to break loose from them, and regained his feet.

While the struggle was still raging wildly inside, Wilson's dogs suddenly began to bark furiously. Another dog-team had raced into the clearing. Jennings, Henshaw, and Angus had arrived. From their observation-post they had watched Wilson's arrival, and as soon as they had seen him enter the shack, they had started for the clearing at a run, taking their dogs and sleigh with them.

Angus and Jennings raced up to the door, leaving Hen-

shaw to mind the dogs, which displayed a marked inclination to pick a fight with Wilson's dogs, which were chained to trees around the clearing.

When Angus and Jennings had burst through the door, all they saw was a struggling mass on the floor of the almost dark room.

"You all right, boys?" shouted Angus.

"Yes," gritted Mason through clenched teeth. "Get a rope quick. We'll have to tie him up. He's more violent than I bargained for."

"I'll get a rope from the sleigh!" shouted Jennings. "You try to give them a hand, Angus!" And he turned around and ran outside again.

A few moments later the raving, screaming madman was trussed up as tightly as if he were in a strait-jacket.

"Lift him up and carry him over to his bunk," directed Mason, getting up from the floor, and wiping the perspiration off his face with his hand. Both he and Grayson were breathing heavily. "He'll quiet down after a bit, I expect. They generally do, when they are trussed up and left to themselves. Somebody light the lantern over there, and start a fire. Where's Fred Henshaw?"

"Outside with the dogs," answered Jennings.

"Better tell him to unharness and come in. We have to have some grub."

As soon as the lantern was lighted, Mason took it. He walked over to the wall and took down a key hanging from a nail near the door. He had noticed that key earlier.

"I think this must be the key to the store-house," he said. "I'm going over to have a look inside. You fellows will have to be satisfied with the light from the stove till I get back. Come along, Grayson."

They went out. The shadows had deepened outside, and all was still and hushed. The stars had begun to peep out overhead. Mason drew a deep breath.

"This is lovely after that stale air in the shack," he said with deep appreciation. "I'm glad everything went as well as it did. For a while I was afraid we shouldn't be able to hold him. God, he seemed to have the strength of ten men."

"He was certainly a handful," agreed Grayson.

They walked over to the store-house, and Mason tried the key in the padlock. It fitted, and the door was soon open. Mason held the lantern up above his head and looked in. On the walls were hanging bundles of fur, and on the floor, alongside the walls, were stacked boxes and bags of provisions. But what particularly held his interest was an oblong bundle of bedding in the middle of the floor. The outlines of a human body inside the bedding could be seen quite plainly, and Mason knew that he had at last found the missing Brent, or at least his mortal remains.

"It's here, Grayson," he said in a low voice over his shoulder. "Come in and hold the lantern while I make an examination."

They stepped inside, and Grayson took the lantern without a word. His face was a little pale. He had never been face to face with murder before, and he dreaded the possibly horrible sight which was soon to be revealed. The tussle with the lunatic had already unnerved him considerably, and now he felt a sickening nausea rise in him. But he fought with all his might to keep it down, so that Mason should not become aware of his weakness, which he was heartily ashamed of.

Mason knelt down by the body and carefully and reverently he removed the bedding. Soon the white, wax-like face of a heavily bearded man lay bare. The features bore a surprisingly calm and serene expression for one who had met a violent death.

"Wonder how he was killed," muttered Mason, as he continued to remove the bedding.

He soon found the answer. Brent had been shot through the heart.

"Death must have come suddenly and unexpectedly," he remarked. "Or at least so I should judge from the expression on his face. If he had known he was about to be killed, some of the horror would have shown on his face even after death. But there is nothing we can do here, so we'll just cover him up and leave him for the present. The body is frozen as hard as rock."

After the bedding had been replaced they left the store-house and walked over to the other cabin.

They found a roaring fire going in the stove. Somebody had dug up a candle from somewhere, and had stuck it in an empty bottle, and placed it on the table. Angus was busy around the stove. Wilson seemed to have calmed down, for the present at least. He was now only muttering to himself, while he glared with murder in his eyes at the occupants of the room.

When Mason entered the room his friends' eyes asked a question, and he nodded his head gravely. But he said nothing.

He pulled one of the rickety chairs over to the bunk and sat down beside Wilson. The latter merely scowled up at him.

"Listen, Wilson," said Mason, in a calm, gentle voice, as if he were speaking to a child. "Remember we are not here to hurt you in any way. You are sick, very sick. And we have come here to help you."

"You've come to mock and torture me," growled Wilson in his throat. "You are the children of Satan, who try to persecute me like you persecute all those who try to walk in our Lord's footsteps."

"You're wrong, Wilson," continued Mason patiently. "We are as good Christians as yourself. At least, we try to be. And all we want is to help you, and make you well."

"You've trussed me up like a beast, ready for the sacrifice."

"No. We've tied you up because, while you are sick, you are not always responsible for what you do. And you might hurt yourself and others. Like you hurt Brent. Why did you kill him?"

"Because he mocked and defied his Maker. I pleaded with him to forsake his evil, sinful ways; but he only scoffed at me. And at last the Lord Himself ordered me to kill him for his sins, like He always destroys those who defy His commands."

"And why did you put Brent's body in the storehouse?"

"Brent was my partner and friend. I had to put him where I could pray beside him every day. I knew that if I prayed long enough his soul would one day see the

light, and then our Lord might in His great mercy wrest Brent's soul from Satan, and take it into His own loving arms. But Brent isn't really dead. He's only asleep. And some day, if I pray strong enough, his soul may still win its way to everlasting Glory."

"I see," nodded Mason, as if he had heard the most natural and normal statement. "Now listen, Wilson. We're going to take both you and Brent with us back to civilization, so that you can both be taken care of. In the meantime, remember we are your friends, and that we're ready to help you in any way."

"I have no friends in this vale of sins. My only friends are our Lord, His Son, His Holy Ghost, and His blessed Angels. And the Bible. Give me my Book."

"Yes. I'll give it to you," said Mason kindly. He got up and shook his head to his friends, who had pretended not to be listening to this extraordinary conversation. "Mad as a hatter," were the words his mouth formed, and soundlessly conveyed to them.

He placed the lantern on the floor beside Wilson's bunk, arranged the ropes around his arms, so he could use his manacled hands to a certain extent, and then handed him the Bible. And at once Wilson began to read, mumbling the words as he went ahead.

When the meal was cooked and ready, Wilson first refused to eat; but after some skilful and patient coaxing by Mason, he finally submitted, and ate a hearty meal.

"Well, Mason. What do we do next?" asked Jennings in a low voice, after they had finished their own meal.

Mason looked over at Wilson; but the latter seemed to be completely absorbed in his Bible, and paid not the slightest attention to what was going on about him.

"You and Fred had better start back to the Narrows at once," he answered. "Grayson, Angus, and I will remain here and look after the poor fellow."

"But you haven't got any bedding," protested Jennings.

"Oh, that'll be all right," smiled Mason. "We don't worry about a little thing like that. There's plenty of wood in the shack, and we've got three caribou coats between us, so we shall be quite comfortable. One of us will have to sit up and feed the stove, and to keep an eye

on Wilson, while the two others sleep. We'll arrange proper watches, so everything will be quite nice. When you get to the Narrows, I want you to arrange for two more dog-teams to go in to the Bend with Grayson and Angus. We have to have one sleigh for Brent's body, and another for Wilson. In the state he's in it will be best to take him along in bonds, carefully rolled in his bedding on the sleigh. We'll pack Wilson's furs and stuff on his own sleigh. And then Angus's sleigh can take bedding, dog-feed, grub, and that sort of thing. You'll have to pack Angus's sleigh and send it up here to-morrow with the others. But don't take any of my stuff. Could you do this for me, Bill, please? "

"Certainly. I'll get you two good teams with a couple of reliable fellows. But I don't like to leave you chaps here. Why not take Wilson in to the Narrows with us? "

"No. It's better to leave things as they are for the present. It'll only excite him to be moved. And keep quiet about what has happened up here, when you get back. I don't want the whole settlement to line up when the sleighs go through the Narrows."

"I'll try to keep sightseers away. But most people will guess what's happened as soon as the teams go up to-morrow. You know what the folk up here are like," deprecated Jennings. "They know almost everything that happens, as soon as it actually occurs. So don't blame me if they turn up to watch the procession. Well, Fred. Let's get going. We've ten miles or so ahead of us, and dark night. So we shan't be able to break any records. Hope you fellows have enough grub."

"Lord, yes. With what's left of the grub you brought along for this picnic, and what's in the cabin and store-house, we shall have plenty to see us through the whole winter, even if you forget all about us and don't come back," said Mason with a smile. "Now don't you two innocents get lost."

"Oh, I guess we'll manage somehow," grinned Jennings. "Well, come on, Fred. These fellows seem to want to get rid of us."

The night passed uneventfully in the cabin, and Wilson gave no trouble. He slept fitfully, and every time he woke

up he read his Bible for a while. Mason had left the lantern standing by his bunk.

Mason, Angus, and Grayson divided their watches into three-hour shifts. The two off duty tried to make themselves as comfortable as they could on the spare bunk, using the three caribou coats as bedding.

Mason occupied himself during his watch with writing a letter to Mary Warner. He wrote with an indelible pencil on leaves which he had torn from his note-book. He had no other stationery, and could find none in the shack. He would get an envelope down at the Narrows to-morrow, and would send the letter down with Grayson. He struck an optimistic note in his letter. He told her that he had obtained definite information that her father was up somewhere in that region. But he omitted to say how utterly vague that information was. He assured her that he would find Warner, if the latter had not returned home by now. Then he described little incidents of their trip, which he thought might interest her, but he left out all mention of the tragedy of Wilson and his partner. He merely said that he had finished his task up at Beaver Narrows, and that he was now free to devote all his time to the matter of locating her father. But all the things which he would really like to put down remained unwritten. However, the mere fact of communicating with her, though it was at long range, gave him a feeling of pleasure. It seemed to make a brighter and more cheerful place out of the dreary, bare shack, which was only dimly lighted by the lantern over by Wilson's bunk, and the candle in the empty bottle on the table in front of him.

The rays of the sun had barely reached the tops of the tallest spruces on the following morning, when the three dog-teams from the Narrows drove into the clearing. Accompanying them were two Indians and Bill Jennings. But Mason and his companions had been early astir, and were ready for them. They had packed all Wilson's furs and other belongings in bundles, ready for transportation, and they had shrouded Brent's body in the bedding, and had lashed it firmly with ropes. So everything was in readiness for immediate departure.

It did not take the party long to load and trim the

sleighs. Wilson at first seemed disposed to give trouble. First he objected to leaving. Then he refused to being transported like a bundle on a sleigh. But Mason spoke soothingly and gently to him, and finally they got him placed in the sleigh. He was made as comfortable as possible. In the bottom of his sleigh was spread a fairly thick layer of his own fur, and after he had been carefully wrapped up in his bedding, he lay as comfortably as in a bed. He insisted on having his Bible with him in the sleigh, so this was put in with him.

At last they were ready, and the four dog-teams started, Angus's team leading the way.

At Beaver Narrows a short stop was made at the Hudson's Bay post to load on some provisions, needed for the trip south. Quite a few people had collected around the post. As Jennings had predicted the night before, some sort of rumour had got about of what had taken place, and the curious had gathered. But Mason's heavy frown kept the crowd at a respectful distance, though avid stares were directed towards the sleighs.

Mason obtained an envelope for his letter from Jennings, and handed the missive to Grayson with instructions to mail it as soon as he got to Portage Bend. When Grayson read the inscription on the envelope he grinned broadly, and lifted quizzical eyes to Mason, a quip ready on his lips. But something he saw in his friend's face made him check his budding levity. He merely nodded his head, and placed the letter carefully in the inside pocket of his tunic.

"Gosh. I feel like an army-commander," he remarked with a grin, surveying the string of dog-teams. "Or like an admiral."

"Well, see that you get your fleet safely into port without any casualties," grinned Mason. "Remember, young fellow-me-lad, you have the responsibility. Be extra careful with Wilson, and don't get him excited. Humour him like a child, and always take good care that he's well secured at night, or else he may break loose and murder you all. But Angus has been up against this kind of business in the past, and he'll know how to handle him."

"Oh, we'll take care of him all right," assured Grayson.

"But it's certainly a queer and cheerful outfit I'm starting out with. One lunatic and one corpse. Strange bed-fellows, as it were."

"It's all in the day's work up here. You'll have queerer things to handle before you're through with our Detachment. But you'll get used to it in time, and like it."

"Well, I may get used to it, but liking it? Nossir!" rejoined Grayson firmly. "I think we're all ready, so we'd better start."

A few moments later the dog-teams had left, and were soon swinging along the trail down on the snow-covered ice of the Narrows, the string of dog-trains looking like a long, black snake, wriggling along.

The curious crowd dispersed, undoubtedly going off to try to unearth a few facts about this undoubtedly most exciting and stirring event which had happened up there for many a day. It certainly gave them promise of material for conversation and gossip for the remainder of the long winter.

Jennings and Mason went up to the house. The latter was now eager to start his inquiries and investigations in connection with Warner's strange disappearance. He was first going to make inquiries around the Narrows, and if he found no clue there, he intended to search the country to the west of Beaver Lake first. And if that proved fruitless, he would have to try the country to the east. But he was afraid he had a long and confused trail ahead of him.

CHAPTER IX

ONE afternoon towards dusk, about two weeks later, Mason pulled his dog-team to a halt in a small clearing just off a trail several miles to the south-east of Beaver Narrows. He was tired and discouraged. So far he had not found the slightest trace of Warner and his companion. He, Jennings, and Henshaw had made exhaustive inquiries among the Indians, trappers, and hunters around Beaver Narrows; but nobody seemed to have seen or heard of Warner that winter. Then Mason had started out on a wide circle northwards, westwards, southwards, and then eastwards through the hills to the west of Beaver Lake. He had visited every trapping-camp, and every Indian settlement in the region, and had questioned every occupant in those places. He had found many who knew Warner, and he had found several who had met him up there last summer; but nobody had even heard that he had been up in that part of the country this winter. It was as if the two prospectors had been swallowed up by the earth. If it had not been for that one man, who had actually seen Warner and his companion on the trail, heading for Beaver Narrows, he would have thought that he was entirely on the wrong track.

But as matters stood now, he was beginning to feel as if he were hunting for a needle in a haystack. And he hardly dared think of what Mary Warner would think of him if he failed her after his confident promises.

However, he was now on his way back to Beaver Narrows, and from there he intended to cut across the country eastward.

It was difficult country he would have to tackle to the east. A wide range of jumbled, rugged hills, and deep, steep-walled ravines lay between Beaver Narrows and the

Indian settlements and trapping-grounds farther east. Most of it was wild country, seldom visited by anyone except for a few roaming hunters. The main trail up to the settlements and villages in the country over there followed a river, which flowed into Moose Lake, and which ran on the other side of the rocky range. Of course, the easiest way for him to reach that country would be to use the main trail, but that would mean a week's detour. First he had to drive south to Moose Lake, and from there northward again up Stony River, as it was called. So he had decided to cut right across the wild, rocky range, which would take him only three or four days. And he also hoped that he might run across Warner somewhere in there, with luck. He was pretty certain now that Warner's claim must be in there somewhere. He intended to get one of the hunters up at Beaver Narrows to go with him as guide, and to help break trail, as there were no regular trails through that desolate country. He simply had to find Warner, both for Mary Warner's sake and his own. He quailed at the thought of returning with his mission unfulfilled, and having to meet the scorn in Mary Warner's eyes when he confessed failure.

These thoughts passed through his mind as he was unharnessing his dogs and preparing his camp.

He had just got the fire started when he heard dogs approaching from the east on the trail, beside which he was camped.

"Hullo. Visitors for the evening," he muttered with a smile. He welcomed the prospect of companionship, so he could get away from his own rather dismal reflections for a moment.

A few minutes later two dog-trains drew up to the clearing, and to his vast delight, Mason discovered that the two drivers were old friends. They were two white "free-traders", MacDonald and Bancroft by name. The two had for years been trading with the trappers north of Portage Bend, and were consequently two particular thorns in the side of the two "legitimate" fur companies.

"Hullo, you old sourdoughs!" shouted the grinning corporal. "Step right into my parlour, and make yourselves at home."

"Dam'ed if it ain't Corporal Mason!" boomed MacDonald. "What the hell are you doing up here all alone?"

"And what do you mean by makin' yourself at home at our private campin'-place?" asked Bancroft with a grin.

"What do you mean? You fellows haven't bought the country up here by any chance, have you?"

"About. Anyhow, me'n Mac decided way back to camp here to-night, an' that makes it ourn, don't it? But seein' you're here, an' all fixed up, I guess we'll let you stay," said Bancroft magnanimously. "Won't we, Mac?"

"Guess we will. Though it's sorta humiliatin' for two respectable fellows like us to camp with a Mountie. Might plumb ruin our characters if it's foun' out," grinned MacDonald.

"Your kindness almost moves me to tears," remarked Mason. "And which one is the best cook of you two? Seeing you're the hosts here, it's up to you to do the cooking," he added sweetly.

"Hey! Nix on that stuff!" yelled Bancroft. "The first comer allus does the honours, as you might say."

"Not when he's a guest," grinned Mason.

"He, he, Bob!" chuckled MacDonald. "You bought it that time. Seein' you've laid claim to this here camp, you'll have to do the honours. You're elected cook, unanimous."

"Absolutely!" agreed Mason.

"All right. All right. Seein' you're all agin me, I guess I'll show you I'm a good loser. I ought to have known better than start argufyin' with a Mountie. Them fellows are as slippery as eels, an' allus make it appear as if they's right, even when they's all wrong. Gold darn nuisances, I calls them," he remarked, trying hard to look abused.

"I'm afraid you're right, Bob," grinned Mason. "This world is simply swarming with nuisances such as Mounties and free-traders. But cheer up. I've got a nice chunk of caribou-meat in my pack. Got it up at the Narrows."

"Caribou-meat!" shouted Bancroft, immediately forgetting his grouch. "Hear that, Mac? He's got caribou-meat. An' me'n you just pinin' for a taste o' caribou-meat. Say, let's get them dawg-critters unharnessed an'

put away in a hurry, an' I'll cook you fellows a meal what is a meal! "

Soon Bancroft was busy with pots and pans, while Mason and Mac were taking their ease on the spruce-mat in front of the fire.

"Where are you fellows coming from now?" asked Mason.

"From Prince Albert. We brought in a load of furs, an' got us a new tradin'-outfit. Then we thought we would go up here, an' pester Bill Jennings an' Fred Henshaw for a spell," grinned MacDonald.

"Pester is right! That's what Bill calls you free-traders. Pests and afflictions. If he catches you, he'll flay you alive," said Mason with a laugh.

"Sure. That's why we're sneakin' into the country through a back-door, like," confessed MacDonald with a wide grin. "But, gosh, Bill's really a white man, an' all right. His bark is worse'n his bite, as the sayin' is. He knows there's enough fur up here both for the companies an' the few free-traders who come in here. Last season Bob an' I was up here, an' then we stayed with Bill for a coupla days. You should have heard him shoot off his mouth about free-traders! Gosh, the way he was talkin' you would think we was too mean an' low to get into hell, even. But at the same time he treated us as if we was his own brothers, an' gave us o' the best he had. Even to drinks. An' when we were ready to pull out, he begged us to stay for another few days. Fine fellow, Bill. An' a square-shooter. What are you doin' up here, Corporal? "

"Looking for a man. Do you happen to know an old prospector called Joe Warner? "

"Joe Warner? I sure do! Hardly a fellow who's been roamin' aroun' up here who hasn't run acrost that ol' sour-dough some time or other. What's he been an' done? " asked MacDonald.

"Nothing, except that he's gone and got himself lost," answered Mason. "And I've got to find him."

"He, he, he! That's a good one," chuckled MacDonald. "Joe Warner lost. Hear that, Bob? Ol' Joe Warner has gone an' got himself lost, an' the corporal is tryin' to locate him."

Bob Bancroft turned his face towards them.

"Say, what're you givin' us, Corporal?" he asked. "Say, that ole sourdough can't get lost. Not in this country, he can't. Say, he knows about the whole North better than a city fellow knows the streets o' his home town. Joe lost. Hell!" he snorted disdainfully.

"Well, at least he's missing," explained Mason, and made the situation clear to them.

"Say, that's sure some funny," observed MacDonald thoughtfully, when he had heard the facts. "Not a bit like Joe Warner to renege when he's promised to turn up at a certain time. Lots o' fellows uster call him Allus-on-time, 'cause he always used to turn up on the dot if he'd promised. Guess something must have happened to him, all right. Who's the fellow with him?"

"We haven't been able to find out."

"Hm. Funny they should both plumb vanish, as you might say. How many dog-teams did they have—two?"

"No. Only one. But a darn good one. Joe Warner bought the best team in town. One that used to belong to Joe Sayese."

"What!" interrupted MacDonald, sitting up with a jerk.

"He bought Joe Sayese's team?"

"Yes. What about it?" asked Mason, surprised at MacDonald's sudden, keen interest.

"Hey, Bob!" called MacDonald, instead of giving a direct answer. "The corporal says Joe Warner was drivin' Joe Sayese's dogs. What do you think o' that?"

"Gosh, he couldn't," called Bancroft back from his location by the cooking-fire. "We know that, seein' we met a fellow drivin' just that team on the trail towards P.A., when we was on our way up about the middle o' December."

"What's that?" asked Mason sharply.

"Sure. Bob's talkin' Gospel truth," said MacDonald. "We met that fellow when we was about two days out from P.A. He was headin' towards town."

"But he couldn't have been driving that particular team," protested Mason. "I know for a fact that Warner bought it, and started out from the Bend with it. Surely you fellows must have made a mistake."

"Nope. You can bet your sweet life we've not!" stated MacDonald emphatically. "Say, listen. Both Bob an' I have been racin' against Joe Sayese's team several times in the Dog Derbys, they call them, down to the Ben'. An' that team has allus beaten us. So we know them dogs as well as we know our own. Yessir. That fellow was drivin' Joe Sayese's team. We're both ready to take the oath on that any time. Ain't we, Bob?"

"You said it, Mac!"

"What sort of a fellow was it?"

"Queer sort of cuss. Short an' stocky-like. Full o' whiskers. But, somehow, he didn't look as if he was much used to the trail. Looked clumsy the way he lumbered along, if you see what I mean. An' he sure didn't seem to know much about handlin' a dog-team. The dogs seemed to go along at their own sweet will, an' he didn't seem to get half the work out o' them he ought to."

"Did you speak to him?"

"Nope. He seemed a kinda scowlin', unsociable cuss. Only nodded his head shortly when we gave him a friendly 'How-dy!' An' dam' if the fellow didn't seem scairt when our teams passed his, growlin' an' snappin', as their custom is. He looked as if he stood ready to jump an' run. Queer cuss, all right. Say! Do you think that mighta been Warner's partner?" asked MacDonald in some excitement.

"I don't think so," answered Mason quite untruthfully. In fact, he was quite positive that the man was Warner's partner. The description just furnished by MacDonald tallied in every particular with the one he had previously obtained. But he also knew that MacDonald and Bancroft were inveterate gossips, so he was certainly not going to give them an inkling of what he was thinking.

And those thoughts were far from cheerful. What he had just heard had shed a new, sinister, ugly light on the situation. If this man had got to Prince Albert towards the middle of December, what had happened to Joe Warner? He could hardly have stayed up in the North to guard their claim while his partner went in to register it at the Land Office. In the first place, they could hardly have had enough provisions for that. Secondly, the pros-

pect of any claim-jumper turning up and beating them in the race to the Land Office was too remote to be taken into consideration. Thirdly, if Joe Warner had remained up at the claim, he would certainly have sent a message out for his daughter with his partner.

And if Warner had met with some accident, his partner would certainly have reported it at the first trading-post he struck, or at least, when he had reached Prince Albert. But this mysterious partner had done neither of these things.

Then there was the alternative that the partner had not reached Prince Albert, that he had perished on the trail before he got there. But Mason ruled that alternative out at once. When MacDonald and Bancroft met him, he had only two more days of travel to that town. And that over an easy trail without any hazards, where trappers, lumbermen, and scores of people were passing daily. So it was impossible for him to have come to grief on that run.

No, there was only one explanation that could account for Warner's disappearance and his partner's silence. And that explanation was fraught with such utter ugliness and foulness that he hardly dared entertain it. But common-sense reason told him that he was right in his surmise. His partner must have murdered Warner to grasp the whole claim for himself. This was the only explanation that would fit the known facts. It had only taken a few seconds for these thoughts to race through his mind, and he turned his attention back to MacDonald, when he heard the other say something to him.

"What was that you said, Mac?" he asked, careful to conceal his perturbation.

"I said, if that was not Warner's partner, how had he got hold o' Warner's dogs?"

"Well, we may have been given some wrong information about the dogs. Or Warner may have traded with the fellow who had them when you met them. You know, those prospectors are great lads for trading."

"Sure. Or he may have lost them in a game o' poker or sumpthin'," supplemented Bancroft from the cooking-fire with a grin. "Them prospectors sure favour a game o' poker. An' the faster it is, the better they like it."

"Well, something of the sort must have happened," said Mason. "Say, did you fellows meet one of our constables, Angus MacKenzie, and a couple of Indians on your way up?" he asked, to get them away from the present subject, which he did not want them to pry further into.

"Nope. Where was they headin' for?"

"For the Bend."

"Nope. I guess they must have hit the Bend trail before we got that far."

"Must have. Or you couldn't have missed them. They had four sleighs in the outfit."

"Gosh Almighty!" cried Bancroft. "A regular peerade. What was they celebratin'?"

"I'll tell you all about it after we've had our meal. It must be about ready by now."

"Just about. Just a few more minutes, an' you fellows will be able to eat a regular banquet, as them politicians call a feed."

While they waited for the meal to come up, and later, while they were eating, Mason's mind was busy with the important question about how to proceed with his investigation in view of MacDonald's disclosure. If his reasoning and deductions were correct there ought to be a distinct clue to be found in Prince Albert. But if they were faulty, the only clues would be found up here. So what was he to do?

Was he justified in breaking off his investigations up here, and trying the Prince Albert angle? He thought he was. But would Inspector Weston think so? That was the important question. Of course, the Inspector had always encouraged independent initiative in investigations of this sort; but this would be such a sweeping divergence from instructions that he feared he might lay himself open to censure. However, he was so positive that he was right in his deduction, that he decided to act on his own initiative, censure or no censure. He would go straight in to Portage Bend and put the whole matter as it now stood before Inspector Weston, and if the latter agreed, he would go on to Prince Albert and test his theory. He would start early in the morning, and travel

fast. His dogs were in fairly good shape, and could still stand hard travel. But there were the matters of dog-feed and grub for himself. He had only enough provisions for a few days left. That would mean a return to Beaver Narrows to replenish his grub-box, and that would cause a delay of three or four days at least. But stop! He had an idea.

He turned eagerly to MacDonald, who was lying stretched out, placidly smoking his pipe.

"Say, Mac," he said. "Could you fellows spare me enough grub and dog-fish to take me down as far as Moose Lake?"

"Sure. We can spare you enough dog-feed, and most o' our loads is groceries an' such-like for tradin', so you can have all the grub you want. But what do you want to get down to Moose Lake for? I thought you were up here tryin' to locate Joe Warner."

"I can't waste any more time looking for him just now. I've been away so long already that the Inspector will think I've deserted. So I'd better head for home, before they send out a search-party for me," lied Mason easily. "If you fellows could oblige me about the dog-feed and grub, it would save me a trip to Beaver Narrows. I can get all the provisions I need for the rest of the trip in once I get to Moose Lake. I'll give you fellows a due-bill for what you give me, and you can cash it at the Barracks when you get to the Bend. All charged at your own local prices, of course."

"Sure. That's quite okay."

"Hey! You fellows get your tools ready!" yelled Bancroft at this moment. "Grub's comin' up."

They were all hungry, and all other matters were pushed into the background for the moment. Bancroft proved himself a capable cook. Mason was, perhaps, the only one who did not do full justice to the menu. He was gravely thoughtful and preoccupied. But his companions noticed nothing of that. They were too busy to do the meal the honour it undubitably deserved.

"Say, Bob. Me an' Mason have just closed a deal," announced MacDonald, as soon as the keenest edge had been taken off his hunger. "I've sold him some dog-

fish and grub to take him down to Moose Lake."

"Gosh, Mac. We sure are going down in the world," remarked Bancroft, trying to speak, chew, and grin at the same time. "We've always dealt with respectable people up to now. Is he goin' to pay cash?"

"Nope. I guess he's broke. Quite down an' out, as you may say," grinned MacDonald. "He'll give us a due-bill."

"H'm! Not so good," mumbled Bancroft, trying to look dubious. "Well, I guess we may get our money sometime, if we go after them police-fellows hard enough, and threaten to sue them."

"Sure. Bring a lawyer along when you go along to collect," advised Mason with a grin. "That'll scare the Inspector stiff, and make him cough up the dough in a hurry."

"Thanks for the advice. That's just what we'll do. You have to act like that when you deal with customers you can't trust very far," grinned Bancroft. "But don't disturb me any more. I'm just beginnin' to enjoy my victuals."

After they were all comfortably stretched out after their meal, and their pipes were drawing to their satisfaction, Bancroft turned to Mason.

"What about that peerade you was mentioning before?" he asked. "You promised to tell us about it after supper."

"Oh, yes. Did you fellows know a trapper called Wilson and his partner, Brent? They have been trapping up around Beaver Lake for a couple of seasons."

"Sure. We know them both. Have bought furs from them. Decent fellows. But Wilson is too full o' religion to suit a sinful ol'-timer like me," said Bancroft with a grin. "What about them fellows?"

"Some time back Wilson went crazy, and for some reason or other he shot Brent and killed him. This constable I was talking about—a new fellow called Grayson—and Angus MacKenzie and I went up and got Wilson. The others took him and the body of Brent in to the Bend, while I stayed behind to try to locate Joe Warner."

"Gosh Almighty! An' you don't tell us this till right

now? " exclaimed Bancroft. Both he and MacDonald were staring at Mason with stern reproach. It pained them considerably that he had wasted their time discussing more or less problematical matters of little importance, such as the probable whereabouts of Joe Warner, when there were really concrete matters of such transcendental importance to impart.

" Say, tell us all about it at once. An' don't beat about the bush any longer," directed Bancroft impatiently.

Mason did, giving them all the details.

When he had finished his two absorbed listeners relaxed and drew deep breaths.

" Gosh. I'm not surprised that Wilson went bug-house at last," commented Bancroft. " He was always broodin' too much on religious matters. It's not healthy for any man's min' to speculate too much on them things. Try to live like a Christian, an' leave the speculatin' to parsons an' such-like, is the way I've always felt about it. But that was a right slick way you trapped him. Just proves what I said before, that you Mounties are slippery as eels. Hope you fellows won't be after me one o' these fine, bright days."

" Well, you'd better mend your sinful ways and step carefully, then, Bob," grinned Mason. " Or else you may find me on your trail some day. And I should certainly hate to throw you into the Bastille."

" Into the what? "

" In the coop. The Bastille is only a fancy word for it."

" I get you. I ain't so well up in them high-brow words. Well, seein' we're goin' to part company to-morrow mornin', you'd better pick out the grub you want from our loads. An' then we'll turn in. Business before pleasure, as the sayin' goes."

The business was soon transacted. Mason picked out all he required from the two free-traders' stock, and gave them a due-bill in return. Then they had another smoke and a chat, before they rolled in. And on the following morning at daybreak Mason took leave of them, and set out on his long trek down to Portage Bend, followed by the shouted good wishes of his two friends.

CHAPTER X

ABOUT noon a week later Corporal Mason pulled into Charley's Place. Both he and his dogs were weary. Their hard pace was beginning to tell on them all. Since they left Portage Bend neither man nor dogs had had much rest, except for the few days during the blizzard, and the couple of days up at Beaver Narrows. So Mason could not travel quite as fast as he should have liked. But even so they did quite well.

Charley received Mason with marked pleasure.

"Come right in, Corporal!" he shouted from the door of the cook-shack, as soon as Mason halted his dogs outside. "I just got in a fine hunk o' beef a few days ago, an' I'll shake you up a thick, juicy steak in the wag o' a sheep's tail."

"Thanks, Charley. That certainly sounds good," answered Mason with a smile. "I haven't tasted beef since God knows when."

He left the dogs in their harness. They had laid down on the snow where they had stopped, obviously grateful for a spell of rest. There was no danger of any of them wanting to wriggle out of the harness and go nosing around in their present condition.

"Gosh. It's good to sit down," exclaimed Mason, after he had entered the cook-shack and had shaken hands with Charley. "I must be getting old. Don't seem to hang together on the trail as well as I used to," he complained.

"You sure look like a cripple," laughed Charley, who was already busy over by the stove. "Say, that was a pretty slick piece o' work you did up at the Narrows. Angus an' the new constable—Grayson, ain't it?—told me all about it."

"How were they getting along when they passed here? Did Wilson give them much trouble?"

"Nope. They told me he had been sorta quiet all the way so far. But they had him trussed up pretty solid, so I guess he had to be good. He hardly spoke to nobody. When he wasn't readin' his Bible, he was mumblin' to hisself, an' scowlin' at everybody. An' he sure's got a wicked, mean eye, when he looks at you. Me an' him uster be pretty good frien's once. He allus had a meal here when he passed; but now he looked at me as if he wanted to murder me if he could. Queer thing when a man goes out o' his head," he continued reflectively. "I often wonder what happens to his brain. I guess it must shift about in his head or sumpthin', or turn upside down. Don't you think so?"

"Don't ask me. I'm no doctor," grinned Mason.

"I wasn't exactly askin'. I was more thinkin' aloud. But it's funny, ain't it? One day a fellow talks to you as sensibly as anybody, an' the next day he just babbles queer things that don't mean nothin'. Queer as hell, I calls it. However. How did you get on, Corporal," asked Charley, switching from his profound researches into psychiatrics to more lay matters. "Did you fin' Joe Warner?"

"No. I couldn't find a trace of him. I don't know where that old sourdough is hiding himself. Listen, Charley. Do you happen to know Joe Sayese's dogs?"

"You mean Joe Sayese, the breed from the Ben'?"

"Yes. That's the man."

"Well, I know Joe well; but I can't say the same thing goes with his dogs. Most dog-teams look alike to me, except that some look better than others. Hosses is more in my line. I can tell them apart same as human bein's."

"I see. Well, I wonder if you happened to notice a fellow who must have passed by here shortly before the middle of December. He was a shortish, stocky fellow, inclined to be stout, I believe. He was driving a team of big, grey, matched huskies."

"Let's see now," ruminated Charley, scratching his chin, and looking up towards the ceiling for inspiration.

"Sure!" he exclaimed presently, his eyes turning from the ceiling to Mason. "I guess that's the guy you mean. Description fits him to a T. An' the time checks too. Queer cuss he was, too. He stopped outside here one day. Shortly after noon it was. Came in an' asked me about the trail to P.A. I tol' him, an' then asked him to set down, an' I'd shake him up a meal. But he said: 'No, thanks,' short-like, as if I'd been an' insulted him. An' when I asked him where he came from, an' what he was doin' up here, he just scowled, turned aroun', an' legged it out o' the shack. An' almost before I could git over to the winder, he'd started his team, an' was beatin' it down the trail. A sour-lookin', unsociable cuss, if ever there was one."

"Did you get a good look at his face, so that you could recognize him if you saw him again?"

"Can't say I got a good look at his face," said Charley thoughtfully. "He had the hood o' his caribou coat pulled down over his face, an' the rest o' it was most all whiskers. But I'm sure I could reckernize his eyes. Grey an' cold, they was. An' I guess I could reckernize him easy from his voice an' figger too. He had a sorta high-pitched voice, an' he spoke like a city guy. Oh, yes. I should reckernize him easy if I met him again, even without his whiskers. What's that guy been an' done?"

"I rather suspect him of having pulled off some claim-jumping stuff," said Mason evasively. He was not going to confide in Charley. Charley was a fine, trustworthy fellow; but he was not quite to be trusted with any secrets. Even if he promised not to say anything about a matter, and though he honestly intended to keep the promise strictly, it happened that his busy mouth had run away with him, and that he had let things slip out inadvertently, before he was even aware of the fact. And Mason did not intend to have his suspicions broadcast just yet.

Soon Mason had a thick, big steak in front of him, garnished with fried potatoes. Then there were hot soda-biscuits and butter, and strong, excellent coffee. And Charley announced that there was a bit of bread-and-butter pudding heating in the oven. A veritable banquet for a man fresh in from the trail.

Charley sat opposite him, an elbow resting on the table, his head resting on his hand, regaling his guest with all the latest news and gossip from the trail.

"Say!" he exclaimed suddenly, some concern in his voice. "Now when I get a closter look at you, you look all used up. Why not stay over here for the night, an' rest up a bit?"

"No. Haven't time. Have to get going," answered Mason.

"Well, you know best, o' course. But you sure look as if you need some rest."

"Oh, I'll rest when I get to the Bend," smiled Mason. "We aren't allowed to loiter on patrol, you know."

"No, you fellows are always humpin' yourselves, as if you was hurryin' to catch a train. Guess you catch it from the Captain. He uster be a son-o'-gun for hustlin' on the trail." By "the Captain" Charley meant Inspector Weston. Charley invariably used the equivalent army titles when referring to, or addressing, any commissioned member of the Mounted Police. He argued there was more "class" to the army titles. "Gosh," he remarked to Weston on one occasion. "Inspector, Superintendent, Commissioner, and such-like titles soun' as if you guys was just ordinary pavement-pounders. An' you ain't. You're all as real soldiers as ever was. So I ain't goin' to insult you by usin' a dam' fool title that's sorta a disgrace to you fellows." And no argument could ever convince Charley that his stand was not eminently proper and logical.

A half-hour later Mason thanked Charley for his hospitality, and bade him good-bye. Charley followed him outside. That was his invariable custom with more distinguished guests.

Mason started his dog-team, and soon the forest had swallowed him up again.

As mentioned before, a few miles south of Charley's Place the trail forks. One prong leads south-east towards Portage Bend, while the other continues almost due south towards Prince Albert.

Before he reached that fork a fresh inspiration had come to Mason. Why go to Portage Bend at all? Why not

push straight on to Prince Albert? He would save a lot of time if he did. If his superiors were going to frown on him for his independent actions, they would do just the same amount of frowning whether he turned up at Portage Bend or Prince Albert. And in the latter case he even had the excuse that he was trailing the man he suspected of being Warner's companion. Anyhow. Dash it all! When he was first assigned to an investigation, surely nobody would censure him very hard if he went about it his own way, as long as he could prove that he had logic and common sense on his side. And he felt positive he had. Of course he had to go before Superintendent Trench, the Commanding Officer of "F" division, when he got to Prince Albert. But though the Superintendent was strict in many ways, he was also a decent, sensible chap, who always treated the men under him with the utmost fairness and understanding. So he did not think the Superintendent would annihilate him once he had stated his case. So before he reached the fork he decided to take the Prince Albert trail.

He finally arrived in Prince Albert one of the first days in March. He went straight up to the headquarters of "F" Division, a number of grey stone buildings, built in a square with a spacious courtyard in the centre, and situated on a hill overlooking the town.

It was well into the evening when he arrived. He immediately reported to the sergeant-major, who was at first inclined to look at him and his arrival there with suspicion. Like all good sergeant-majors in every branch of the Services, he always looked for some ulterior motive in any unscheduled action or move on the part of members of the ranks below him. But after Mason had stated his case, his stern face relaxed a little.

"All right, my lad," he said. "There seems to be quite a bit of sense underlying your actions. Of course, I'm not the Super, and I don't know what he'll think about it. He may want to slaughter you, when he sees you to-morrow morning. But in the meantime you'd better run along to the Barracks and hunt out a bunk for yourself."

"Thank you, sir," said Mason. He retired, feeling that

rest just now would be exactly what his system needed.

The Superintendent did not slaughter him the following morning when Mason was summoned to his office. In fact Mason's reception was even more cordial than he had dared hope for in his most optimistic moments.

"How-do-you-do, Mason," was the Superintendent's greeting, when Mason clicked to attention before his desk and saluted. "The sergeant-major told me why you are here. But before we go into that, I want to tell you I'm pleased with the way in which you handled that affair up at Beaver Narrows. They brought that poor fellow, Wilson, in to Portage Bend about a week ago."

"Thank you, sir," said Mason, rising several points in his own estimation. When Superintendent Trench said he was pleased with any action of one of his subordinates, it was certainly a matter for self-congratulation. "Do you know if they had any trouble on the journey down, sir?"

"Everything seemed to have gone very smoothly. I got the report yesterday. That poor chap has been officially certified insane, and has been sent down to an asylum. We have located some relatives of Brent's down in Manitoba, and his body has been shipped down there for burial. So that case is all finished. Now about Joe Warner. Inspector Weston reported some time ago that he was missing, and that he had detailed you to search for him. And he hasn't returned home yet. I've taken a special interest in this case, as I used to know Warner well. I ran into him quite often here and there in the old days, when I was mushing the trails in the north country. From what the sergeant-major told me, I gathered you suspect his partner of having murdered him?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, give me your reasons for your suspicions in your own words. The sergeant-major only gave me a brief outline."

Mason immediately told him of his investigations, how he had ascertained that Warner and his companion had been heading towards Beaver Narrows, and how the two simply seemed to have vanished off the face of the earth before they reached that settlement. Then he went on to

tell about his meeting with MacDonald and Bancroft, and disclosed the important information he had obtained from them. Then finally he propounded the conclusions and deductions he had drawn from the facts he had gathered.

"H'm," grunted Superintendent Trench when Mason had finished his story. "It certainly looks deucedly ugly," he continued, nodding his head gravely. "I'm afraid your deductions are quite correct. Can't see how the situation could possibly be otherwise than you suspect. And now you want to look through the records of filed claims down at the Land Office, and try to establish the location of the claim that way?"

"Yessir. That's my idea. I feel certain that fellow would file his claim as soon as he arrived here. When he would go to the length of murdering his partner to get the claim for himself, he certainly wouldn't waste any time before he had it properly registered, sir."

"No. Perhaps not. But the fact that he's murdered his partner, supposing, of course, he has, might make him afraid of proceeding further in the matter."

"I don't think so, sir. As far as he knows, nobody has any suspicion about his connection with Warner. Nobody saw them together in Portage Bend, and very few people met them on the trail. And on the few occasions when they met people, Warner's partner always seemed to have had the hood of his caribou coat well down over his face. And they seemed to have purposely avoided all trading-posts and settlements on their way up. So I expect this fellow thinks that nobody could identify him as Warner's companion on the trail. It would never enter his head, especially if he's more or less a cheechako, as Warner's last letter to his daughter suggests, that his dog-team would give him completely away, sir."

"No. That sounds logical enough. Well, go down to the Land Office and see what you can ferret out. I'll phone down and tell them you're coming. That will make matters easier for you."

"Thank you very much, sir."

Mason saluted and retired, well satisfied with the interview.

He walked down the snow-covered road which dipped

straight down the hill from the Barracks, crossed the bridge over the river at the foot of the hill, and proceeded up Main Street.

He turned into the portals of the red brick building which housed the Land Office, and went straight to the registry-office.

"You are Corporal Mason, aren't you?" asked the clerk in charge when he entered.

"That's right."

"We got a telephone-call from your Super a few moments ago. He told us you wanted to have a look at the mining claims filed here during December. I've got it all ready for you here." He pushed a heavy ledger towards Mason. "On that open page are all the entries for December. There are only seven of them as you see."

"Thanks," said Mason, bending over the tome.

He let his finger glide slowly down the column which held the description of the location of each claim, reading each entry through carefully. At the fifth entry his finger stopped. The digit quivered slightly as he read that particular entry, and into his eyes flashed a gleam of excitement. The location of the claim, described in that entry, was in the hills almost due east from Beaver Narrows, between that point and Stony River.

Stony River, as its name implies, is particularly rich in rapids and cataracts. Especially is this true of its more northern portion. For about thirty miles above Moose Lake it is quite smooth and placid, but above the thirty-mile limit it is simply a chain of more or less turbulent rapids. It has its origin far to the north, and twists and turns and foams between rugged hills, picking up numerous tributaries flowing down to it from ravines and valleys, until by the time it loses its identity in Moose Lake it has swelled to a river of considerable width and depth. At some points on its tortuous journey through the hills it approaches Beaver Lake almost to within a distance of twenty miles, only to veer away again and to widen the gap to almost sixty miles at other points.

As far as Mason could judge from the description, this claim must be located approximately thirty miles from Beaver Narrows, and about ten miles from Stony River.

He felt pretty certain he had found what he was looking for. His eyes travelled horizontally across the page, and stopped when they fell on the rubric containing the name of the claim: "The Three Lone Spruces". Mason looked at the entry with a puzzled frown. A vague, inchoate memory stirred in his mind. There was something familiar in that name, as if he had heard it before somewhere. And peculiarly enough, the scene in Inspector Weston's office, when Miss Warner had been telling her story, now precipitated itself into his mind with vivid clearness, apparently coming from nowhere for no reason whatever. Now, why should that scene come into his mind at that particular moment. . . ? he mused. Then suddenly remembrance came with a rush. When Mary Warner had described the dream or vision she had had, part of her description of the landscape had been: ". . . the outstanding feature of the picture was a dominating, white, rugged ridge, quite bare of trees except for a clump of three spruce-trees, bunched together on the highest point. . . ." Her words came back to him with startling accuracy. It was almost as if she were speaking them right into his ear.

He became aware of a queer, eerie feeling creeping over him. He had never been the slightest superstitious, and had been inclined to scoff at those who professed they were. This was the first time in his life he had ever come across anything which seemed to border on the supernatural. Was there after all something in telepathy? There must be, if this was really the claim Warner had discovered. Mason knew how the prospectors generally named their claims from some peculiarity or vagary of nature in their immediate vicinity. So Warner would naturally have called his claim "The Three Lone Spruces" if the landscape up there was actually as it had appeared to Mary Warner in her dream. And if her dream was actually based on thought-transference from her father, it would be only natural that his mind would be concentrated on the ridge with the three spruces. They would in all probability be a landmark and guide to the claim.

" 'The Three Lone Spruces,' " mumbled Mason almost loudly. "Decidedly queer, and a little ghostly, and creepy. . . ."

Mason stopped his mumbling with a start, suddenly remembering that he was not alone. He cast a quick glance at the clerk, wondering if the latter had noticed that he had behaved rather queerly. He thought the clerk was regarding him rather strangely, but that might be only imagination. But, however that was, he was brought back from his psychic speculations to earth and the business in hand. He looked for the name and address of the claimant: "John Smith. General Delivery. Post Office, Regina, Sask."

John Smith. H'm. General Delivery, Regina. H'm. Sounds suspiciously like an alias, mused Mason. Perhaps the fellow had taken care to cover his tracks in case something went wrong after all. But why Regina and not Winnipeg? According to Warner's letter his partner on his last venture came from Winnipeg, so why had he not given his address as Winnipeg? Probably more caution to break the trail. It all looked darn suspicious, decided Mason. But, of course, the name might be genuine, and the address too, for that matter. And John Smith might not have been Warner's partner at all, though everything seemed to point towards it. But there were still a couple of entries left. He had better have a look at them first.

He carefully examined the two remaining entries, and even continued into January, but John Smith's claim was the only one to be located anywhere near the district where Warner and his partner had last been seen. So he felt convinced that John Smith's claim was the one to investigate, even if he discounted the strange coincidence about its name in connection with Mary Warner's dream.

"Could you spare me a moment, please?" he asked the clerk. He pointed to the entry in the ledger. "Has the certificate been issued to that man Smith yet?"

The clerk bent over the ledger.

"Sure," he said, pointing to a column. "There's the date it was forwarded to him. Fifteenth of January."

"Thanks. I see." Mason was a little disappointed. He had hoped that the certificate had not been dispatched yet, and that they could trap the man at the Regina post office, when he called for the letter containing the certificate, and hold him for questioning. But now that opportunity

was gone. And he could not quite see how they were ever going to trace him now.

"Can I have a sheet of paper and a pencil, please?" he asked the clerk. "I have to take down this whole entry and show it to the Super."

"Sure. Here you are," answered the clerk cordially, pushing the required articles towards him. "What's all the trouble?" he asked with pardonable curiosity.

"Oh, there seems to be some difference of opinion about the right ownership of this claim," explained Mason airily and inaccurately.

"Case of claim-jumping, eh?"

"Something of the sort."

"Well, that's nothing in our young lives," grinned the clerk. "We only register them as they come. It's up to the courts to decide whom they properly belong to, if there's any difference of opinion about it."

"Quite so," murmured Mason politely, as he began to jot quickly down the entire entry relating to John Smith and his claim.

When he had finished his task he thanked the obliging clerk for his assistance, left the Land Office, and hurried back up the hill to the Barracks.

He did not have to wait more than a few minutes on his return before he was called into the Superintendent's office. He reported what the records had to tell him, showed the Superintendent the extract he had taken from the ledger, and explained his reasons for believing this was the claim he was looking for. He did not mention the coincidence of the three spruce-trees. He was afraid the Superintendent would consider that rather fanciful, to say the least. He might even suspect the corporal of having a screw loose somewhere. But even with this omission the Superintendent was strongly inclined to agree with him.

"Yes. There is hardly any doubt that is the claim Joe Warner went up to stake," he remarked. "It all fits in. That particular location is about sixty or seventy miles north of Stony River Indian Reserve. And the village on the Reserve is the only Indian village or settlement within a few days' travel from the claim. And if I remember correctly from Inspector Weston's report, Warner had men-

tioned in his letter to his daughter that the location of the claim was a few days' travel to the north of an Indian village? " He looked inquiringly at Mason.

"That is quite correct, sir," said Mason.

"Well. That fits in too. Only one thing puzzles me still. The man who told you he had met Warner and his companion on the trail seemed to have met them after they had passed Moose Lake and the trail leading up to Stony River. How do you explain that? "

"I thought of that, sir, and think I can explain it. You know, sir, there are no trapping camps farther up Stony River than a few miles from the Reserve. Consequently Warner and his companion would have to break trail for sixty or seventy miles if they went in that way. But if they followed the Beaver Narrows trail, and cut into the hills a few miles south of the settlement, they would only have to break trail for half that distance. And though the country would be somewhat rougher, they would save time and lots of labour by going in that way. And I've been told, sir, that Warner has as keen sense of direction as an Indian, so as he knew the location of the claim in relation to Stony River, he would not have any difficulty in finding the place even if he did go in through a back-door, as it were."

"Yes, that sounds quite plausible. And I happen to know myself that Warner's trail-sense, as we might call it, was as keenly developed as that of the best of the Indians. However, you'd better start straight up there to-morrow morning and put your theories to the test. If you are right in your surmises, you should find Warner's Indian friend on the Stony River Reserve. You know John Black Bear, the chief of the Reserve, of course? "

"Oh, rather, sir. He's a great friend of mine," smiled Mason.

"Good. He'll give you all the assistance you need. Fine fellow, John Black Bear. That's one Indian that education hasn't spoilt. He's putting all he learnt down at St. John's College in Winnipeg to good use. His is the best-run Indian Reserve in the whole of the north country, I believe. I wish there were more like him. However, I'm going to get Inspector Weston on the long distance

straight away, and tell him of the latest developments. He may have some additional instructions for you. He knows all that country like a book. In the meantime you'd better run along and make yourself ready for your trip."

"Yessir. But what about that man, John Smith?"

"What do you mean, Corporal?"

"Well, sir, wouldn't it be a good idea to try to locate this man, Smith, and question him? Though I suppose that would prove difficult if his name is really an alias. If the Land Office hadn't already forwarded his certificate to him, we could have laid a trap for him down at the Regina post office, and arrested him, I suppose."

The Superintendent looked up at him with a smile.

"I'm afraid you're galloping a little too fast now, Corporal," he said. "We have absolutely nothing against John Smith at present. We don't know that this man Smith had any connection with Warner whatsoever. Neither do we know that Warner has met with foul play. We don't even know that anything at all has happened to him."

"But considering all the circumstances, sir, it certainly looks as if this man could throw some light on the disappearance of Warner," retorted Mason, sticking bravely to his guns.

"I can't quite agree with you there, Mason. We don't really know that this man Smith is the man who was seen driving Warner's dogs. All we know is, that he has located a mineral claim up in the district where Warner is supposed to have disappeared. So we have not the slightest justification for apprehending him, and questioning him, even if we knew where he was. And there is another point you're overlooking. If we find this man, and question him, as the case stands now, he would of course deny emphatically ever having seen or heard about Joe Warner. And, of course, we should have to release him immediately, with apologies thrown in. And if he really were guilty of some crime against Warner, a questioning would serve him as sufficient warning to make him clear out at once, and make himself hard, or even impossible, to find. So until we have some more tangible evidence against him we'll have to leave John Smith strictly alone."

"I quite see, sir. I'm afraid I was rather hasty," said Mason with an apologetic smile. "But even so, I feel that Warner has been murdered, and that this John Smith is the murderer, sir."

"Quite. So do I, for that matter. But before we proceed against the gentleman, we first have to produce proof that a murder has been committed. Then we must produce the *corpus delicti*. And lastly, we must produce incontrovertible proof that John Smith was Warner's sole companion at the time the murder took place. After that, we can take action," summarized the Superintendent with a smile.

"Quite, sir. And I hope I shall be able to produce some of these proofs when I return," answered Mason determinedly.

"Yes, I hope you'll have the whole matter solved by the time you return. You've done quite well so far. Well, you'd better run along, and I'll get in touch with Inspector Weston."

"Very good, sir. Thank you, sir." And Mason left the office.

Mason was gravely thoughtful as he walked over to the quartermaster-sergeant's office to arrange for provisions and stores for his journey. Proof or no proof, he felt certain Joe Warner had been murdered. And the trouble was, he had to write to Mary Warner and give her at least a hint of his suspicions. He could not let her go on cherishing vain hopes for her father's safe return when there really was no hope whatever. He was glad there was no time to run down to Horton to see her, or he might have considered it his duty to do so to report on developments. Much as he should have liked to meet her again under happier auspices, he shrank at the mere idea of seeing her under the present conditions. It would be far better to prepare her by letter for the blow which he felt certain was soon to descend on her. Though Inspector Weston had maintained that time up at Portage Bend that she felt convinced her father was dead. But even so, she would certainly cling to hope, were it ever so faint. That was only human nature. And he shrank with keen distress from being the medium of dashing the last, lingering hope away from her.

Mason sighed deeply. Fate had certainly played him a scurvy trick, he thought. For the first time in his life he had really fallen in love with a girl, and immediately an impish, malicious Fate had to wreck all his hopes. He felt that if his theories were correct, Mary Warner would always somehow connect him with the hideous tragedy which would soon enter her life. And this would create a dark shadow between them, which it might prove impossible to penetrate or remove. So Mason did not feel happy. He felt that all his hopes about Mary Warner had cruelly and definitely been shattered.

As soon as he had finished his business with the Q.M.S. he hunted out a quiet nook, in which to write his letter.

He found it a much harder task than he had expected. He had really nothing to put down but suspicions that a tragedy had really taken place. But he could not state his discoveries, suspicions, and conclusions with brutal frankness. That would be too cruel. It had to be done subtly and discreetly.

He started, and tore up sheet after sheet in despair before he got half-way through the letter. But at long last he completed one which he thought would do. This is what he had written:

"DEAR MISS WARNER: I am sorry to have to tell you, that the confidence I expressed in my letter to you from Beaver Narrows of expecting to locate your father in the near future has not justified itself. I was not able to establish the site of his gold-claim, but I finally ran across a lead, which brought me in here to Prince Albert. I am confident now that I have discovered a clue to the exact whereabouts of your father's claim, and I'm proceeding up there tomorrow morning to continue my investigations. But I find it my distressing duty to warn you, in view of certain facts I have unearthed, that I am afraid the fear which you expressed in Inspector Weston's office that time, that your father had met with some great and serious disaster, was quite justified. It grieves me more than I can say to write this, but you displayed such splendid courage that time up at Portage Bend that I feel you would much rather hear the truth, than be bolstered up with false hopes, which

would in the end prove to be cruel disappointments. I really do not dare hold out any hope to you of your father's safe return.

"Heaven knows how I wish I could have sent you a more encouraging and cheering message, but I think it would be unfair of me to hold out hopes, which I feel sure can never materialize. And if my letter hurts you, which I am afraid it will, I can only ask your forgiveness, and assure you that I am acting from the motives I think best."

For a long time he sat frowning gloomily down on the letter. He was far from satisfied with it. It appeared crude, clumsy, stiff. But it was the best he could do, he admitted dismally to himself. And somehow he had the queer presentiment that with this letter he sounded the knell over all his hopes of ever gaining Mary Warner's love. After this letter she would hardly retain her esteem for him, if she had ever held any. She must always consider that he acted cruelly, though he acted from the best motives. And that was a thing she would never forgive. It was a damnable, accursed business all through, reflected Mason lugubriously.

For one moment he felt strongly inclined to tear up the letter, and not write at all, but let Inspector Weston report to her the present aspects of the case. But he felt that would be rank cowardice. If Mary Warner should happen to hear that he had been down to Prince Albert, which she certainly would, and she realized that he had omitted to write to her to keep her posted, as he had promised to do, she would certainly feel more scornful than ever towards him. It was all so hopelessly complicated and tangled.

He again sighed deeply. He was feeling very unhappy.

But suddenly he straightened up. With a purposeful air he pulled an envelope towards him and boldly inscribed Mary Warner's name and address on the face of it. Then he hastily finished his letter by adding: "Yours sincerely, James Mason" at the bottom. He blotted letter and envelope, folded the letter and pushed it into the wrapper, which he quickly sealed. Then he walked hastily over to the orderly-room and put his letter with the outgoing mail.

It was as if he wanted to hurry all he could to have the dismal business over and done with.

In the afternoon he was again called in to Superintendent Trench.

"I've had a talk with Inspector Weston over the long distance," the latter informed the corporal. "He agrees with your views on the matter, and approves of all the steps you've taken in the case. He's sending Constable Grayson and Angus MacKenzie up to Charley's Place to join you. He thinks the trip will be a useful experience for young Grayson, and Angus will of course be a very valuable assistant to you. The Inspector wants you to get in touch with John Black Bear as soon as you get to Stony River, and have him help you to find out if it was from one of his people that Warner got his tip. If it was, and the location he gave Warner tallies with the location of Smith's claim, the matter is of course clear. Then you'll have to go up to the claim, and try to find out what happened to Warner. If he's actually dead, you must find his body. It may be this will prove to be impossible while the snow still covers the ground. If it does, you'll have to stay up at Stony River Reserve till the snow has disappeared. The spring is not far off, so you won't have very long to wait. Then get as many men together as you can, and scour the country around the claim till you find the body. It can't have been buried in the frozen ground, so it must be somewhere on the surface under the snow. Of course, the body may have been pushed into a hole through the ice on some lake or other, so if you don't find it anywhere on the ground, you'll have to drag the lakes and rivers around the claim. Though if it has been pushed into water, it may of course rise to the surface in the spring. Now this is a pretty big order I'm handing to you, Mason," added the Superintendent with a smile. "But I hope you'll prove equal to the task, and that you will return with results."

"I shall certainly do my best, sir."

"I don't doubt that. However, Inspector Weston told me that he had sent written instructions along for you with Grayson, so you'll find any further information you may require there. Everything ready for your journey?"

"Yessir. I'm pulling out early to-morrow morning."

" Good. Well, I'll bid you good-bye, then, Corporal," said the Superintendent with a smile, holding out his hand. " And the best of luck to you."

" Thank you very much, sir." Mason shook the proffered hand, saluted, and walked out of the office.

CHAPTER XI

MASON started back on the long trail to the Beaver Lake district in the early dawn on the following morning, and sunrise found him well on his way. Signs of approaching spring had begun to make themselves noticeable in the atmosphere down here. The air was warmer and the thermometer had ceased its dips down to zero. In the warmer air the snow had settled to a firmer consistence. The trails were hard and smooth, and formed almost friction-less run-ways for the sleigh.

But in spite of these agreeable changes in travelling conditions Mason felt far from light-hearted. As a rule he started out on his patrols into the north country in a gay, carefree holiday spirit; but this time he felt more gloomy and miserable than he had ever felt in his life before. The whole world seemed dark and dismal in spite of the bright sun, which set the quiet, white world around him asparkle. The glare of the sun was now beginning to become so strong that it became necessary to wear dark glasses to avoid snow-blindness.

Early in the afternoon of the fifth day he arrived at Charley's Place. There he found Grayson and Angus already waiting for him. They had arrived the night before.

Charlie was delighted at this influx of guests, and said so in unequivocal terms. But he appeared very disappointed when Mason announced that they were going straight on almost immediately, or as soon as his dogs had had a rest.

"But say, Corporal. You can't git far before dark anyhow," he remonstrated. "Why not stay here, an' start early in the mornin'? Gosh, I hoped we might have

a game o' euchre, or crib, or poker, or sumpthin' to-night. Better stay," he coaxed.

"Sorry, Charley. But we're in a hurry. There'll be a moon to-night, so we'll travel straight through the night. If we don't hustle we may be caught by the break-up. And then heaven only knows when we'll get down."

"But where's you boun' for anyhow?" asked Charley curiously. "Constable Grayson an' Angus ain't told me nothing yet. They say they don't know nothin' but that they's to report to you here. Still huntin' for Joe Warner?"

"Well, yes. We'll try to locate him if we can, of course. He hasn't returned home yet, I understand. But we are really going up to have a look around before the trapping season is over. You know, that's ordinary routine towards spring."

"I see. An' what about the fellow you was askin' about when you passed here goin' down? I heard you kept straight on in to P.A. where he was boun' for. Did you fin' him?"

"No, I didn't. But he wasn't important anyhow," said Mason glibly. He hoped his explanations had satisfied Charley, and that the latter's avid curiosity had not been excited. When Charley's curiosity was once aroused, he invariably began a line of speculations. And his speculations, with copious marginal notes, soon became the property of the whole north country. And Mason wanted as little gossip as possible about their present expedition. "Excuse me a moment, you fellows. I want to read these letters."

Grayson had handed him two letters when he arrived. One contained the instructions from Inspector Weston, and the other was one from Mary Warner, addressed to him at Portage Bend.

He read the latter first. She thanked him for his interesting letter from Beaver Narrows, and said she hoped he would have success in his search for her father. And she wished him an early, safe return to civilization. It was really only a short note, but very friendly and amiable.

He smiled a little bitterly when he had read it. By now she would long since have received his letter from Prince

Albert, and her feelings towards him would no longer be friendly and amiable, he felt certain. But that could not be helped. He had only done his duty as he saw it, he told himself, as he folded the letter up and put it in his pocket.

Then he turned his attention to Inspector Weston's instructions. As usual they were short and to the point. They were practically the same as Superintendent Trench had already given him. But the Inspector was very emphatic and explicit in warning him that their suspicions about Joe Warner's fate must be kept a strict secret for the present. Nothing must leak out that might eventually reach the ears of John Smith, in case their theory about that person was correct. Any leakage like that would give him sufficient warning to make him disappear for ever. Weston also advised Mason that he could take John Black Bear fully into his confidence. The chief was a man who could be trusted to keep any confidences imparted to him strictly to himself.

When Mason had finished the Inspector's letter, he looked thoughtfully and searchingly at Charley. The latter was busy around the cooking-stove, and seemed to have lost any further interest in their expedition. Mason hoped that his ambiguous explanations had satisfied him. But Charley persisted in deploring their refusal to spend the night with him.

"Gosh!" he remarked presently. "By the time you fellows come back here, I'll have broke camp, I guess, an' will be on my way out. An' then I won't see you till next winter, if I'm still alive. You sure ought to stay, so we could have sort o' a farewell celebration."

"I'm sorry, Charley. But we really can't stay," answered Mason. "We don't like to be caught up here like rats in a trap with our dogs and trappings. Much as we should like to stay and entertain you, we really must hurry off all the same."

"All right. If you must, you must, I guess. But it's sure disappointing. Anyhow, I'll soon have a meal ready for you. You'll leave here with full bellies, anyhow."

A half-hour or so later they were ready for the trail again. Charley followed them outside for a last "Fare-

well". When they had started he scratched his head with a puzzled air, as his eyes followed the two dog-teams till they disappeared in the forest. He had sensed such a peculiar undercurrent of terse restraint and gravity in his late visitors. They had not at all been their usual carefree, cheerful selves, he reflected.

"Dam' if I don't think there's something big in the win'," he confided to himself. "Them guys ain't out on just an ordinary patrol. Nossir. However, I guess that's their bisness. But I wish they'd told me what it was all about. I hate them riddles. Keeps you thinkin' too much. Darn them for a close-mouthed bunch, anyhow." He shook his head in sad censure of the lack of confidence in human nature. Then, bethinking himself of the cold, he re-entered the cook-shack, shaking his head from time to time, a frown of deep concentration on his face.

About six o'clock that night Mason and his companions stopped on the trail to have their supper, to feed the dogs, and to wait for the moon to rise. They were not a particularly cheerful trio. Mason's moody depression and the nature of their expedition seemed to cast a pall over them all. The usual carefree chatter and banter around the camp-fire was entirely lacking. They seriously discussed the task ahead of them, and their prospects of finding Warner's body. They none of them doubted that he was dead. Of course, Angus and Grayson had been informed by Inspector Weston about Mason's discoveries in Prince Albert, and the object of their journey. Their profession of ignorance to Charley had been only a subterfuge dictated by Weston's warning to maintain strict secrecy.

About eight o'clock they started again. A clear, almost full moon cast a soft, bright light on the trail. As usual the dogs revelled in the night-driving. There was such a vast variety of diversions at night. Frequently rabbits scurried across the trail ahead of them, and they immediately broke into a gallop to try to intercept it. That the rabbit had disappeared in the woods long before they got up to the place where they had seen it in no way damped their ardour. It was the sporting spirit of the chase which really mattered. Then at other times a fox or some other

night marauder would shoot across the moonlit trail, to create further excitement. Then there would perhaps be a wolf howling in the woods somewhere, and that, of course, called for immediate, challenging response. And then there were all the deep shadows which the moon laid across the trail, and which might hide many things of interest. There was nothing in the monotony of day-travel in this. No, sir! Their tails were well up, swinging defiantly and exuberantly from side to side, as they trotted eagerly along in search of excitement.

For several days they continued this mode of travel. Around daybreak they snatched a hurried breakfast, while the dogs rested for half an hour or so. Then they continued till shortly after noon. Then they pitched camp, fed the dogs, had a meal themselves, and slept till evening. Then they had another meal, and as soon as the moon was up they were off again. But after five days the moon rose so late that there was no further advantage in travelling by night. By this time both men and dogs were beginning to show signs of weariness from their forced pace, so a full night's rest was received with thankfulness by all.

The weather kept favourable all the time till they reached the north end of Moose Lake, when they had only one day of travel up to Stony River Reserve. But during the night they were encamped at the north shore of the lake one of the sudden blizzards, which mark this season of the year in the North, sprang up; and it kept them prisoners for two days. The trail up to the village led up the centre of the wide Stony River, and down this the blizzard was sweeping in blinding, raging fury, so it was impossible to go on.

Mason chafed and fumed at the delay. He wanted to get up to the Reserve as soon as possible, to have his theories verified or disproved. He longed to have this miserable, ghastly business finished for good and all.

He tried to cast off the moodiness which had him in its inexorable grip, at least outwardly in front of his companions, but he felt he made a poor fist of it. He often wondered if they in any way suspected the reason for his depressed spirits. But he decided they couldn't possibly.

At least, they pretended complete ignorance.

Mason had begun to foster a fierce hatred against the man whom he called Warner's murderer openly to himself. He felt that this unknown individual was directly responsible for the wrecking of his dreams in regard to Mary Warner. He completely overlooked the fact that if it had not been for that same individual in the first place, there would have been no reason for Mary Warner to enlist the aid of the Police, and then he would in all probability never have met her. But, then, Mason's reasoning was neither quite logical nor unbiased when he brooded on what he had come to look on as his shattered romance—which was almost continuously. . . .

When they started out again in calm, clear weather on the morning of the third day, they were faced with considerable trail-breaking, though for the most part the gale had providentially swept the snow off the river and piled it up against the banks. It was only in turns which had been screened from the wind that the snow had piled high over the trail. And this caused considerable delay. They did not arrive at the Reserve before the afternoon of the following day.

The settlement which Chief John Black Bear ruled with a gentle but efficient hand was exceptionally neat and tidy. There was no evidence of the general shiftlessness and squalor so usual in Indian settlements and villages throughout the North. The houses and cabins looked well cared for, and were all whitewashed. The exception in colour was the chief's own roomy house. This was painted white, while window-frames and door-frames were painted a dark green.

When they pulled up at the chief's house they were greeted by his wife, a pleasant, pretty young Indian girl in her early twenties, very neatly dressed. She informed them that her husband was out at his trapping-camp in amongst the hills, some five miles farther up the river. She hospitably asked them to come in and make themselves at home, while she sent somebody for her husband. But they decided to push on to the chief's camp, as they were bound in that direction, anyhow.

Several dog-trains had come down from the trapping-

grounds after the blizzard, so they had a good trail to follow. If they kept right on they should reach John Black Bear's camp before sunset.

They actually arrived at their destination a little before six o'clock, when the sun was hanging low in the western sky.

Chief John Black Bear, who had come in from his trap-line a short while before, received them with great pleasure and cordiality. He was an open-faced, intelligent-looking Indian in his middle thirties. There was about him the air of quiet dignity and authority of a man who is in the habit of issuing orders and of being obeyed.

"Hello, Mason!" he greeted in excellent English, while his features crinkled in a pleased smile as he shook hands. "Hello, Angus. Glad to see you fellows up here. Seems a long time since you've paid me a visit." He looked inquiringly at Grayson.

"This is Constable Grayson, Chief," introduced Mason. "He's a new-comer to the Detachment."

"Glad to meet you, Grayson," said the chief, holding out his hand. "This is your first trip up to this part of the country?"

"No. I was up at Beaver Narrows not so long ago with Corporal Mason and Angus."

"Oh, yes. I heard about that. You went up to get a trapper who had gone crazy and had killed his partner. So you were one of the war-party. And how do you like the North?"

"From what I've seen of it, I think it's great," answered Grayson promptly.

"Glad to hear it. I think it's rather great myself," smiled the chief. "But why didn't you fellows make yourselves at home in my house down in the village? You could have sent for me instead of coming all the way up here. And you would have been much more comfortable there than in this shack."

"Your wife made the same suggestion," explained Mason. "But as we're going on up the river most probably, we thought it was better to push ahead."

"Up the river?" asked the chief, showing surprise. "Some hoodlum or other hiding in the hills up there?"

"No. Not as far as we know. But we're looking for somebody or something up there. And we want your help."

"You know you're always welcome to all the help I can give you. But unharness your dogs, and come into the shack. Although spring is not so very far away, it's still a little too cold to hold pow-wows out in the open. And then you can tell me what you want, while I cook a meal for all of us."

The inside of the shack was rather Spartan in appointments, but orderly and tidy, like everything connected with Chief John Black Bear. A bright, crackling fire was burning in the small cooking-stove, placed in the corner of the one room.

"Now go right ahead and tell me how I can help you, while I hustle around the cooking-stove," invited the chief, when they were all as comfortably settled as the sketchily furnished cabin allowed.

"Right," said Mason, who was sitting on the chief's bunk beside Angus. "Do you happen to know an old sourdough of a prospector called Joe Warner, Johnny?"

The chief grinned broadly.

"I sure do," he answered. "I've seen him around this country on and off since I was a papoose. He's always pottering around looking for the elusive gold. He was up here last summer. Stayed in the village for a few days." His back was turned to his audience while he spoke the last sentences, so he missed the expressions of excitement which burst out on the three faces watching him. They felt that the trail was beginning to become warm.

"Do you know what he was doing here?" asked Mason eagerly.

"Oh, he had been up prospecting in the hills north of here. He came across from Beaver Lake, and then down Stony River." Suddenly the chief laughed. "Listen. I must tell you a good story about that," he chuckled. "But you mustn't let it get back to the ears of the fellow it concerns. He's rather sensitive about it. Any of you know old Jacob Many Muskrats down on the Reserve?"

"Yes. I remember him," said Mason.

"I sure know that ol' buck well," supplemented Angus.

"Him still alive? Gosh! He mus' be near hundred."

"Not as bad as that. He's only seventy-five. But old Jacob is still spry for his age. For years he's had a habit of roaming around in the hills north of here during the summers. He takes his canoe, and stays away for a month or so. Well, last summer, coming back, his canoe hit a stone in some rapids up the river, and upset. Old Jacob hit his head against a stone, and was knocked about senseless. He milled around in the pool below the rapids without having enough strength to get out. Just as he was about gone old Joe Warner comes along and shoots down the same rapids without spilling, and he towed old Jacob ashore. Jacob felt pretty bad when he came to and found that a white man had shot the same rapids without disaster where he had come to grief. He considered it quite a disgrace, and felt that he'd lost face. But he was very grateful towards Warner for saving his life, and they were as thick as brothers by the time they arrived at the Reserve. Warner stayed with him a couple of . . ."

"Listen," interrupted Mason hurriedly and eagerly. "Do you know if old Jacob has located gold anywhere up in the hills?"

The chief turned from the cooking-stove and looked reflectively at Mason.

"Well, yes," he said. "I happen to know that he has. At least gold-bearing quartz. But how did you know? I know old Jacob has kept it a dead secret, except for telling me. And what's it all about, anyhow? this about old Joe Warner, I mean?" he added as an afterthought. He guessed some connection between Jacob's gold-find, Warner, and their presence here.

Mason told him the whole story from the day Mary Warner had appeared at the Police Barracks in Portage Bend right up to date.

"So that's how it is," observed the chief thoughtfully, when Mason had finished his story. "So he made Warner a present of his discovery. He offered it to me at first. Wanted me to get enfranchised and take up the claim, and then go to the city and live like a gentleman. But I told him I was quite satisfied to stay as I was, and that I didn't want his gold-claim. When I turned down his offer, he

pledged me to secrecy about his find. He said he wanted to think over what to do with it. He didn't want it to fall into the hands of somebody who was not worthy of it, as he expressed it. Well, old Joe Warner was worthy enough. And what good did it do him? You tell me that you think he has been murdered on account of the claim."

"I'm sure he has. What other explanation can you offer as the case now stands?" asked Mason.

"None. I agree with you completely. It looks to me as if there has been mighty foul play. It's strange," continued John Black Bear reflectively. "Whenever gold is found, dishonesty, crime, and bloodshed seem to follow as wolves after a caribou herd. Gold seems to bring out the worst passions and instincts in human nature. I've heard enough about it to be mighty careful about being mixed up in gold-finds. Locating gold seems to turn most people's minds, and turn them into beasts. That's one reason I didn't care to accept Jacob's offer. Of course, there are some like old Joe Warner who take locating gold like any other business. They never lose their heads even if they should strike it rich. But then they generally get mixed up with some hoodlum, like Warner must have, and generally become losers in the end. However, what are your plans, Mason?"

"First I want to get hold of old Jacob, and get him to tell me the exact location of his discovery,"

"No need to do that. Jacob told me where it was, when he offered it to me. I can take you straight up to it. I'll tell you what I'll do. Early to-morrow morning I'll hike over to the nearest trapping-camp, about a couple of miles away, and get one of the men there to come over here and look after my traps for me. And then I'll go along up with you."

"Thanks. That'll be fine. And once we get up there, I won't rest till I find the body of Warner, if I have to look for it through the whole of the spring and summer. I have to find the body before we can go after that lousy murderer," said Mason viciously.

"If there is a body anywhere near the claim I expect Angus and I shall be able to find it, even with the snow covering the ground," said the chief. "We both know a

thing or two about reading signs in the woods. Don't we, Angus? "

"You bet you," agreed Angus with a grin. "An' we'll fin' it all right. He can't have buried it in the frozen groun'. So it must be somewhere on the surface in the snow. Yessir. Me an' Chief Johnny will fin' it sure."

"But what if the murderer has put the body through the ice into a lake or river? "

Angus lost some of his confidence.

"Well, if he has done mean trick like that, not so easy," he said. "Then we not able to fin' it before ice go out. But I guess he not think o' that. From all I hear he must be green cheechako, an' them never very slick in woods. So I guess we fin' body in snow," he ended optimistically.

"Anyhow, we'll try hard to find it," remarked Mason.

They set out for the hills on the following morning after the chief had arranged for a man to look after his traps.

After they had travelled a few miles up the river the broken trail turned into the woods to the left of them, and was of no further use. So from that point on they had to break trail. But the snow was well packed in most places on the river, so the trail-breaking was comparatively easy. And consequently they made fair time.

Soon the valley, through which the river was flowing, narrowed, and the hills on each side grew higher and more rugged. And finally the valley became merely a wide gash through a chaos of hills and ridges, some of them almost mountainous in dimensions. The numerous rapids in the river were now deeply covered with ice and snow, so they appeared only as slopes, up which the sleighs ran easily.

On the third day their guide left the river and led them into a narrow valley to their left, from which the rocky sides of two hills rose steeply on each side. It was as if they entered the domain of the hills through a rocky portal.

The valley was really only a ravine, through which a tributary evidently flowed down to Stony River. The ice and snow-covered stream formed a passage-way for them, although it was somewhat narrow and bumpy. The remainder of the ravine was densely covered with brush and spruce-trees right up to the rocky walls of the ridges that hemmed it in.

They camped in that ravine that night, and the chief informed them that they would reach their goal some time on the following day.

It was not a very cheerful camp. It was oppressively quiet down there in the ravine. Not even an owl hooted, and they could hear no rustling in the brush of nocturnal prowlers. Even the rabbits seemed to shun the place. At least none came to investigate the light from their camp-fire, which usually exerted such a magnetic influence on the small, curious animals. And the humans all seemed occupied with their own thoughts. The conversation after supper that night was sporadic and rather monosyllabic. It was as if they all were brooding with some dread on what they might find at their journey's end.

They rolled into their bedding early, and were again on their way soon after day had broken on the following morning. The rays from the morning sun did not penetrate into their valley, but they sparkled on the trees far above them on the ridges, and it was as if the sun-bathed trees smiled mockingly at them, where they were toiling along in the shadows below.

As they went on the valley curved towards the right, until it headed almost straight north. Gradually the hills on each side began to recede, and the valley widened. The steep, rocky walls developed into spruce-covered slopes, and around noon they emerged from the valley into a wide, open tract, which was shaped like a huge bowl, or amphitheatre, ringed in by hills. This bowl was about three miles wide north to south, and about four miles long east to west. A level space of snow in the centre obviously marked the site of a lake, while clumps of brush and occasional bluffs of trees evidently grew on patches of firm land in amongst the muskegs which surrounded the lake, and which spread almost right up to the surrounding hills.

The men had stopped at the edge of the bowl.

As Mason looked curiously about him, he was again gripped by the peculiar, tingling, eerie feeling, which had attacked him down in the Land Office in Prince Albert when he had read the name of John Smith's claim.

The scene in front of him was exactly as Mary Warner

had described it that time in Inspector Weston's office. Across the bowl to the north was a rugged hill, which rose bare and white from the dark spruce-forest at its foot. And on its highest point stood a bunch of three tall spruce-trees. The hill, or ridge rather, was about two miles long, as far as he could judge. It was at several points gashed by dark ravines, which cut deeply into it. From that distance the ridge looked somewhat like the arched back of a huge, white cat, streaked with black stripes.

He heard the chief say:

"That bare hill with the three spruces on top is where old Jacob made his discovery."

"I know," murmured Mason absently. He was still staring as a man under a spell.

"How did you know?" asked the chief, looking curiously at him. "Have you been here before?"

Mason tore his eyes away from the view, and turned to the chief.

"No. But the fellow who had registered the claim down in P.A. called it 'The Three Lone Spruces'," he explained. "So it was almost obvious that it must be over there somewhere." He was certainly not going to confide to his companions how Miss Warner had described this selfsame scene as it now lay before them. Inspector Weston and he had kept that part of her story strictly to themselves. Anyhow, he felt certain that if he told them they might think he was slightly unbalanced. He had a suspicion that they already thought him a little queer. "Let us get going and get up there," he continued. "I want to see what we can find."

Early in the afternoon they were camped in among the spruce-trees at the foot of the ridge. As soon as they had unharnessed the dogs and had put their camp in order, they put on their snow-shoes, and set out to locate the stakes of the claim. Mason and Angus walked eastward along the foot of the ridge, the chief and Grayson westward.

About a half-mile from their camp Mason and Angus came across the first stake, and they shouted to the others to join them. The stake was a young spruce-tree, cut off about four feet above the ground. It stood at the mouth of a ravine cutting into the ridge.

A blaze had been cut on the stake, and on this was written the information in indelible pencil, that this was No. 1 stake of the "Three Lone Spruces" claim, that No. 2 stake was situated six hundred yards to the north, that the discovery stake was eighty yards in the same direction, that it was staked by John Smith, and finally the date and year. It was staked on November the twenty-third. The date when Mary Warner had had her queer dream, reflected Mason in new wonder.

The party moved up to the discovery stake, following the ravine. The "discovery" itself was a broad slash of quartz, jutting out of a bare, sheer rock wall on the left-hand side of the ravine. The vein was about five feet wide, dirty greyish in colour, and badly corroded on the surface. It was even possible to pry loose small bits of quartz with their hands.

They each broke loose a sample and examined them curiously.

"Are those yellow specks here really gold?" asked Grayson, gazing at the piece of quartz in his hand.

"Yes. That's gold," answered Mason. "And the quartz seems to be heavy with it. I've seen quite a lot of gold-bearing quartz in the past, but this looks richer than any I've ever seen before. There must be a fortune buried in this hill."

"H'm," grunted Angus. "Depen's on how far lead go. May be only pocket, as miners call it. But looks like real stuff, all right. Funny about them quartz-leads. They often just disappear, an' go nowhere, when you start followin' them up. Anyhow, will cost plenty money to get machinery up here, an' get gol' out."

"Well, that's no concern of ours," remarked Mason. "Let's get on."

The ravine sloped upwards till it finally emerged on the crest of the ridge. A little to their left stood the three spruce-trees. They looked sombre and brooding in their utter isolation.

The back of the ridge was narrow, and only a hundred feet or so brought them to the downward grade. Here on the north side the ridge dipped steeply down to the forest and brush below. The last part of their descent was so

steep that they simply sat down in the snow and tobogganed down.

On a tree at the edge of the forest below a wide blaze marked the continuation of the line, and from that point on the trees were frequently blazed all the way up to stake No. 2. This they found about a hundred yards into the forest. Again the inscription on the stake stated that the claim had been staked solely by John Smith.

"No clue of anything so far," observed Mason moodily. "Nothing that could connect this fellow Smith up with Warner in any way. Everything looks quite in order and innocent. Looks as if our only chance is to find Warner's body. Wonder where and how he was killed, and what the murderer did with the body?"

"He must have killed him up here somewhere," said John Black Bear. "He wouldn't have killed him before Warner had shown him the location of the claim. And he couldn't have done it after they left here, because then he couldn't have written the inscriptions on the stakes he has written. Joe Warner would soon have discovered it if his partner tried any funny tricks. Wise old fellow, Joe Warner was. So I guess he murdered him right up here somewhere, and then wrote the inscriptions to suit himself after. But the question is, what has he done with the body? He may have pushed it into the lake, and he may have taken it along with him on his sleigh and may have dropped it somewhere along the trail. If he has done any of these two things it may take us a long time and the whole of my band to find it."

"Say, if him took body along with him on sleigh, he sure must be one hard, tough guy," remarked Angus thoughtfully. He was standing leaning against the stake, idly scratching in the snow with the edge of his snow-shoe. "Takes plenty tough fellow to lug along guy he's just murdered. Guess it's often funny enough to be all alone up here in the wil's, without no dead man for comp'ny. Guess I wouldn't like fellow I'd just murdered along with me on trail. An' for a guy who's not used to the North, it must be funnier an' queerer than for me."

"You are right there, Angus," murmured Grayson. "I know I didn't feel very comfortable when we brought down

Brent's body from Beaver Narrows, and I had neither murdered him nor was I alone."

"No. I guess Angus is right. It would take a man with nerves of steel to take his dead victim along with him," observed Mason. "So I rather think we shall find the body somewhere in the neighbourhood of this ridge. At least . . ."

Here he was interrupted by a shout from Angus. The latter had bent down to pick up a chip which his scratching snow-shoe had laid bare. He was looking idly at it, when he suddenly stiffened and let out the yell which had interrupted Mason.

"Look, fellows!" he cried. "There's writin' on this chip."

Mason took it from him, and looked at it. It was a small chip, but on it was written in indelible pencil the words, "ards to the so". Obviously the words were fragments of a longer legend.

"Looks as if there first had been another inscription on this stake, and that the original inscription had been hacked off, and a new substituted," he remarked, frowning thoughtfully down on the chip. "This is without a doubt part of the sentence: 'No. 1 stake is situated six hundred yards to the south of this stake.' The usual inscription of direction, you know. Now I wonder . . ."

Again he was interrupted by Angus.

"Not much to wonder about!" he cried excitedly. "Bet this fellow an' Warner first stake claim as partners. Then other fellow kill Warner, an' cut out first writin', an' write what's there now! Bet that's how come."

"Heavens, Angus! I think you're right!" cried Mason, now as excited as Angus. "Here, you fellows! Let's scratch away the snow carefully with our hands around the foot of the stake, and pick up all the chips that have writing on them. These chips may tell us a story!"

They all eagerly set to work. Every chip with any letters on it was carefully placed in one pile, while the blank chips were put in another.

Suddenly Grayson exclaimed:

"Here! Look at this chip I just dug up, fellows. That certainly tells us something we want to know!"

The others crowded around him, and looked at the chip he held in his hand. On it was written in clear letters: "iley and Joe Warn".

"No doubt about it now," said Mason slowly. "This stake evidently first bore the statement that the claim was staked jointly by somebody whose name ends with the letters i-l-e-y and Joe Warner. That proves conclusively that John Smith is a pseudonym, as I expected."

"But why should he change his name?" asked Grayson. "Seems to me he could just as well have restaked the claim in his own name."

"I don't know why. Probably bad conscience made him adopt another name," answered Mason. "But don't let us waste any time speculating on that. Sunset can't be so very far off, and we want to gather all the chips around this stake before it gets too dark to see. We can examine them to-night at the camp-fire, and try to piece them together."

Twilight was already pervading the forest, when they at last decided that they had gathered all the chips. Mason carefully placed all the chips that contained writing into the envelope which had contained Mary Warner's letter, after first having stored the letter itself away in his tunic pocket. He carried the envelope in his hand. He did not dare put the chips in his pocket for fear the snow and frost adhering to them might melt, and the writing become blurred. Now the letters stood out sharp and clear, as if they had just been written.

The blank chips were placed in the envelope which had enfolded Inspector Weston's instructions. They were also taken along, in case they had inadvertently passed one or two chips over that contained letters.

"To-morrow we'll collect all the chips around the two other stakes," announced Mason as they tramped back over the ridge in the growing dusk. "I don't doubt we'll make the same discovery there. We'll have to keep them separate. And by the time we've pieced the puzzle together, we shall at least know the real name of Warner's partner. And then we can do something, even if we don't find Warner's body. I'm pretty sure we can arrest him on a charge of claim-jumping. And then we can have him

explain his manipulations of the stakes, and, incidentally, what has happened to Warner. But we'll first see what these chips have to tell us. And, of course, we may still find Warner's body. And if we do, I'm willing to bet that we can arrest the man on a straight charge of murder," he ended grimly.

CHAPTER XII

"THIS is a worse puzzle than I bargained for," growled Mason, looking down at the chips with knitted brows. They were spread out on a piece of canvas before him and his companions, near the bright camp-fire. They had finished their supper and their camp-chores for the evening, and now they were all intent on piecing together the shavings they had collected. "It's worse than any jigsaw puzzle I ever saw. Some of these pieces are so small that they've only got one or two letters on them. Looks as if they have been pared off with a sharp knife."

"Sure," said Angus. "I saw that at once. Axe don't make thin shavin's like them."

Their task took them hours, and was a severe test to their patience. As Mason had said, some of the pieces were very small and difficult to fit in. One thing that helped them considerably was that they knew approximately what the finished inscription would be. Otherwise the task would almost have been beyond them.

It was getting late in the evening when they at last had assembled the chips sufficiently to be able to establish with certainty the names of those who had made the first inscription. It was written in a sprawling, slanting hand-writing, almost if it had been written by a schoolboy. The legend stated that the "Three Lone Spruces Claim" had been staked by J. A. Smiley and Joe Warner.

"Look," said Mason. "This is written by Warner. I remember his letter to his daughter was written in the same sort of sprawling hand. And this writing is quite different from the inscriptions that are on the stakes now. And we know that the name of Warner's partner was

J. A. Smiley. Furthermore, I'm convinced that J. A. Smiley is identical with John Smith."

"But how can you be so sure of that?" asked Grayson. "A third person may have turned up who's murdered both Smiley and Warner, and pinched their claim."

"Hardly likely. Besides, the description of the man who was seen in company with Warner shortly after they left Portage Bend tallies exactly with the description of Warner's companion given us by the half-breed, who'd met them on the Beaver Narrows trail. And they both again tally exactly with the description given to me by MacDonald and Bancroft of the man who was driving Warner's dogs towards Prince Albert. It would be too much of a coincidence if two men, of exactly the same appearance, should be mixed up in this business. No, I'm quite satisfied that Smiley and John Smith is one and the same man."

"Well, yes. I suppose you're right," said Grayson. "But it seems to me that fellow was awfully careless, leaving those tell-tale chips lying around."

"One of those slips that criminals usually make. And especially amateur criminals. It would probably never enter his head, even, that somebody would poke around among the chips. And perhaps we wouldn't, if Angus hadn't accidentally discovered the writing on one of them. If he gave it a thought at all, he would probably think that the chips would get wet lying around in the snow, and that the writing would get blurred past reading. He would hardly have remembered that any moisture on the wood would freeze immediately, and would preserve the writing as if it was covered by glass."

"No, I suppose he wouldn't think of that," agreed Grayson. "I know it wouldn't have entered my head."

"There you are. Anyhow, he was careless, and that gave us a beautiful clue. The reason he changed his name I don't know, and I won't even bother to guess at it. We now know that the name of Warner's companion was J. A. Smiley, and from Warner's letter to his daughter we know that he hailed from Winnipeg. So it shouldn't be too hard to locate him. I wish we had some muckilage or something, so we could mount these assembled

chips on a sheet of paper. But as we haven't, it can't be helped. We'll have to scramble them again, and then do the whole job over again when we get down to the Bend. But I'll write down the inscription as it now stands. And to-morrow, you'll have to pick up the chips around the other stakes, Grayson. Be careful that you get them all, and that you keep them separate. When you get back to camp, dry them before the fire. Then the writing won't run and get spoilt."

"Right oh. I'll take care of that all right," answered Grayson. "I suppose the rest of you will start looking for the body?"

Mason nodded gravely.

"Yes. And I have a hunch that it won't be so far away," he said. "If the fellow was careless about those chips, he will possibly have been careless about other matters as well. And as Angus said before, it takes a pretty tough customer to cart the body of a man he's murdered around on his sleigh with him. And from the description we have of the man, I don't think he was that tough. At least, according to Warner's letter he was a cheechako, and a cheechako never feels tough or very courageous when he is alone up here, even if he might be tough down in civilization. So I think he has got rid of the body as soon as possible."

"But it will be practically impossible to find it now, when it will be covered by snow," remarked Grayson. "Except, of course, you happen to stumble over it. And there's lots of ground to cover."

Chief Black Bear smiled.

"It isn't quite as difficult as you might think to locate a dead body in the snow up here," he said. "Dead bodies have a peculiar attraction for all animals, so you'll always find plenty of tracks around where a dead body lies."

"But the animals may have eaten the body," continued Grayson, suppressing with difficulty a shudder, as he advanced this gruesome postulation.

"I don't think so," answered the chief. "Except a pack of wolves should have found it. You see, if Warner was killed in November, and he undoubtedly was, the body would immediately freeze solid. And only the fangs of

wolves would be able to make any impression on it. And even a wolf has to be very hungry before he touches anything that has not been recently killed. And even if wolves have eaten the body, there will be left some bones and some rags of clothing. So I suppose even so we'll find enough to make an identification."

"Well, I hope you find the body to-morrow, while I'm picking chips. I'd hate to be the one to find it, if it's half eaten by animals," confessed Grayson candidly.

"Well, finding dead human bodies is never pleasant," remarked the chief. "Especially not if they have been worried by animals. But you'll be getting tough like the rest of us after you've knocked around up here for a while, so you won't think much of having to handle 'stiffs' as Sergeant Wilson used to call them," he ended with a smile.

"No, I suppose not."

During this conversation between Grayson and the chief Mason had been busy writing down in his note-book an exact copy of the inscription on the reconstructed blaze.

"And that's that," he remarked with vicious satisfaction, when he had finished. "This is the first strand of the rope which is going to hang a man some day, I hope. Now get some paper out of the grub-box, Grayson, and then we'll wrap the chips up carefully and mark the parcel. And then we'll roll in. We want to start our search bright and early to-morrow morning."

The following morning was cloudy, and a cold breeze was blowing in from the west. The temperature must have been well above zero, but even so the day appeared cold and raw. The sun only peeped out now and then through rifts in the drifting clouds.

"Looks as if we might get a few snow-flurries," remarked the chief, looking up at the sky. "Shouldn't be surprised if they have rain farther south. There's a kind of a damp smell in the air. I suppose we can expect rain up here too in a few weeks."

"Yes. I suppose it would be just our luck to have the break-up catch us, and keep us cooped up here somewhere till far into the spring," observed Mason pessimistically, as he was strapping on his snow-shoes. "At least, I hope

our work up here will be finished, and that we'll be out of these miserable hills before we get caught."

"Well, if our job isn't finished before we get warm weather, you'll have to come down with me to the village and stay there," said the chief. "We'll take good care of you. And as soon as the snow is off the ground, and the rivers and lakes are open, we'll go on up again, and take every available man on the Reserve with us, and start a real hunt for the body."

"Fair enough. But I hope we'll find the body without going to all that trouble," answered Mason. "Well, let's get along."

Chief Black Bear was to explore the area around the northern slope of the ridge, and the ravines and clefts that cut into it on that side, while Mason took the area around the southern slope. Angus was going to circle around the whole area about a furlong out from the ridge. If Mason and the chief found no sign of the body in the vicinity of the ridge, they were to start circling around beyond Angus; and by this method they would gradually cover closely a wide area of ground around the ridge. They each had taken a light lunch with them, as they did not intend to return to camp before darkness made further explorations impossible for that day. And on the following day they intended to continue where they had left off, using the same method.

The chief and Angus had also taken their rifles along, and Mason his service revolver. They agreed, that if any of them found the body, he should at once fire a shot to call the others to the spot.

Grayson tramped up to the two stakes in yesterday's tracks to gather the chips.

Their dogs saw them depart with keen satisfaction. They knew this would probably mean another day of rest and leisure. As soon as the men had all disappeared among the tall timber, they rolled up on the snow again, and sighed deeply with contentment.

The afternoon was several hours old when the sharp report of a rifle split the silence, which had till then only been gently disturbed by the sighing of the breeze in the tree-tops.

Grayson heard the shot down at the camp, where he was trying to piece together some of the chips he had collected. He at once sat up tensely.

"Good Lord! One of them has found him," he murmured under his breath.

Mason and the chief also heard it where they were circling around in different parts of the woods, a mile or so out from the ridge. They immediately hurried in the direction from which the shot had come.

They both arrived almost at the same time, and found Angus waiting for them outside a dense thicket of willow-brush on the bank of a frozen stream, roughly three-quarters of a mile north-east of No. 2 stake. Towards the willow-thicket led many tracks of animals like spokes towards the hub of a wheel.

"He's in there," announced Angus, jerking his thumb towards the brush. "I seen him. The critters has scratched most o' the snow away from him. His face is badly chawed, but there is enough left to show who it is. It's Joe Warner, all right."

They pressed their way into the thicket. The body, except for the legs, was almost free of snow. What snow had been too solidly frozen for their teeth to do too much damage. So, though the face was badly disfigured, there was enough left to recognize the original features.

It was not a pretty sight. The animals had worried the face, and had chewed some of the clothing. But the body had been too solidly frozen for their teeth to do too much damage. So, though the face was badly disfigured, there was enough left to recognize the original features.

For some moments they stood staring silently down at the pitiful remains of what had once been a man. And as Mason looked a furious rage surged up in him. His thoughts flew to the girl who was waiting down south, perhaps still hoping that he would bring her father back alive and well. And all he had to bring back were these ghastly, gruesome remains! It was his utter helplessness that enraged him. A man may improve or save many desperate situations; but in face of death all efforts are utterly futile and impossible. Death is irrevocable, and cannot be changed.

A murderous hatred and fury against the man who was responsible for this horror welled up in him, like a fierce torrent. For one wild, unreasoning moment he wished that man were within reach at this moment, so that he could choke the life out of the fiend with his bare hands. And as this passion raged in him his hands actually opened and closed spasmodically as if they were around the throat of the man. . . .

"That's Joe Warner, all right," came the chief's quiet voice at his elbow. He was bending down looking intently at the body. "I can swear to that any time."

These quiet, unemotional words brought Mason to himself. He remembered who he was, and remembered that all personal emotions had to be suppressed. He had his duty to perform, a duty in which all private sentiments had to be submerged and forgotten.

"You are absolutely certain of that?" he asked, his voice still shaking a little from his previous passion.

"Quite. I said I was willing to swear to it."

"And you're sure too, Angus?"

"Sure as me standin' here," asseverated Angus.

"I've never seen Joe Warner myself, so I'm glad you fellows are able to identify him positively," said Mason, now again quite calm. "Now let me see what has caused his death."

He knelt down by the body. He had not long to search. On his coat, right over his heart, was a reddish-brown, stiff patch, obviously dried and frozen blood. There was also a gash in the coat.

Mason tried to remove the clothing over the chest, but this proved impossible. Everything was one frozen mass, which defied all his efforts.

"I'm afraid we'll have to wait till the body is thawed out for a proper examination," he said at last. "But this gash on his coat seems to have been made by a knife. So it looks as if he's been knifed to death."

Both Angus and the chief bent over and examined the gash. They both agreed it had been made with a knife.

"We don't need any further examination to decide how he was killed," said the chief. "He's been knifed right through the heart."

"No doubt at all about that," agreed Angus.

"No. It's pretty plain. And it's a plain case of murder, as we suspected," said Mason.

He began to examine the dead man's pockets; but there were no papers of any kind to be found. Either Warner had carried no papers, or the unknown murderer had taken them. All he found was a pipe and a stub of an indelible pencil, and some matches. It was first after they had turned the body over and Mason had explored the hip-pockets that they found evidence which established the dead man's identity without a doubt. Mason found a small bag of tobacco, and on that was written in indelible pencil: Joe Warner.

"That settles all doubt about the identity," said Mason, as he wrapped the articles he had found in paper torn from his note-book, and placed them carefully in his pocket. "And perhaps somebody will be able to identify the pipe as Warner's property."

"Yes, but listen," said the chief. "Both Angus and I have identified him already."

"Quite. But the more corroborative evidence we have, the better. Especially in a murder-case."

"I see. But listen here," continued the chief. "He must have been killed some place away from here. I noticed, when we turned him over, that the body wasn't frozen to the snow underneath, which it would have been if it was placed here while it still was warm. So he must have been carried or dragged to this spot after he was killed."

"Looks that way," agreed Mason. "He's probably been killed somewhere on the claim, and after the murderer has brought him out here. It wouldn't do to have a body found on the claim itself. And I suppose the murderer thought the body was so well concealed here in the thicket that it wouldn't be found."

"Well, and it would have been almost impossible to find it once the snow was off the ground, and the leaves had come out on the willows," said the chief. "There wouldn't have been any tracks to show us the way. And, I guess, there wouldn't have been more than a heap of bones left by then, and then it would have been hard or impossible to

identify the body. Anyhow, nobody would have been able to see how he had been killed, after the flesh had all been eaten off the bones. So it was lucky you got on the trail so quickly. And serves the murdering skunk right! Murdering a decent, harmless old fellow like Joe Warner! Hanging is almost too good for a swine like that!" ended the chief viciously.

"Quite right," agreed Mason. "Give me a hand, so we can get the body out in the open. And then you hurry back to camp, Angus, and get the tarpaulin you brought along in case we should find the body. Also bring along some rope, and pick up Grayson. He'll have to give us a hand carrying the body down to the camp."

Angus was back within an hour, bringing the required articles and Grayson.

"So you found him," said the latter, looking down at the body, while he strove to repress a shudder at the sight. "He isn't a nice sight."

"No, he isn't," said Mason shortly. "Spread out the tarpaulin, so we can get this ghastly job over and done with."

It was almost dark by the time they were back in their camp with their burden.

Angus began preparing supper, while the others were sitting quietly by. They all seemed to be occupied with their own thoughts. Nobody seemed disposed to talk. Whatever was said was mostly short and low-voiced. Especially was Mason absorbed. His chin was sunk on his chest, and he seemed quite oblivious of his friends and his surroundings.

Suddenly he lifted his head, and turned to the others.

"Listen to me a moment," he said. "To-morrow morning we'll start early, and travel as fast as we can down to Johnny's village. From there I'll hurry ahead alone, and try to get down to Portage Bend before break-up traps us. I suppose I could borrow seven dogs in your village, Johnny? I have to travel fast, and want fresh dogs."

"That'll be easy," nodded the chief. "But even if you travel fast it will be touch and go if you make it."

"I know. But I must make the attempt. You, Gray-

son, and Angus will have to follow up with the body, and try to get as far south as you can. But don't take any chances. Stop at a place where it will be easy for you to get canoes, after the ice has gone out. You will know best about all that, Angus."

Angus, over by the cooking-fire, grunted and nodded his head.

"By the way, Grayson. Did you find the chips up by the other stakes?" asked Mason.

"Yes. Same as the others. I had time to look them over before Angus came in. I've wrapped both lots up in different parcels and marked them."

"Good. But another thing occurred to me a little while ago. It struck me it might be a good thing to take back with us one of the inscriptions that are on the stakes now. Then the handwriting Johnnies would be able to decide if they have been written by this man Smiley, when we arrest him. He will of course deny that he is identical with Smith. But the handwriting should fix that. So I'll tell you what we'll do. To-morrow morning we'll pack the sleighs, and the chief and you can start ahead. Then Angus and I will go up to the claim, and Angus can cut out one of the inscriptions with an axe. Angus is a wizard with an axe, and he'll make a neat job of it. After we've cut out the inscription I'll fake another one, as close to the old one as I can."

"But listen, Corporal," said Grayson a little dubiously. "If the murderer should happen to come along, he would notice that the stake had been tampered with. It would be hard to copy his handwriting so closely that he would be fooled. And if he saw the stake had been tampered with he would probably disappear for ever."

"I don't think he'll notice it, even if he should happen along. You see, after I have made the inscription, I will thaw some snow in my hand and rub it over all the inscriptions on the claim, so they get blurred. Then it would be hard to detect any difference in the writing. So if he comes along he'll think sleet or rain has caused the damage. He would hardly come along now until after break-up. Anyhow, I'll try to copy his handwriting as closely as I can."

"What about the body? He'll miss that, if he comes back and looks for it. Which he undoubtedly will."

"Oh, yes. He'll look for it, all right. I suppose he intends to bury it if he returns here. But when he sees it has disappeared, he'll probably think that animals have devoured it and carried away the bones. And that reminds me of another thing. Don't any of you tell whom we have found. Better warn your people, Johnny, not to let it be known that we've been up here even."

"I'll fix that," assured the chief. "My people will keep their mouths tightly shut if I tell them to."

"Good. And you, Grayson and Angus, had better tell any inquisitive person that you're bringing down the body of a trapper whom you've found frozen to death up near Moose Lake. Just say that nobody seems to know who it is, and that you're taking the body down for identification."

"Right oh. Angus and I'll be as diplomatic and discreet as anything. Won't we, Angus?"

"Sure thing," grunted Angus.

"Anyhow, we may have caught the murderer before you get very far. At least we know the name of Warner's partner, and that he hails from Winnipeg. So he shouldn't be very hard to find. And when we've found him, he'll have to explain what he knows about all that's happened up here. And I don't think we shall have any great difficulty in proving that he is the actual murderer. Of course, it all depends on if I can beat the break-up down to Portage Bend. If not, the Lord only knows what complications might crop up." Mason ended with a deep and thoughtful frown.

CHAPTER XIII

ABOUT forty miles to the north-west of Portage Bend lies Glengarry Lake. It is approximately twenty miles long from east to west, and two miles across from north to south. On the north shore is situated a small settlement, which is flanked to the east by the Hudson's Bay Company's trading-post, and to the west by that of the Revillion Freres'. Several rivers flow into the lake from the north, and from the south-east corner a fairly wide river flows down to the Saskatchewan River, about fifteen miles to the south.

The country around the lake is flat and low, with the exception of a few low ridges here and there. The northern spruce-forest hems the lake in on every side, though the forest itself is at many places broken by tracts of swamplands and muskegs in the vicinity of the lake.

Corporal Mason had been trapped here at Glengarry Lake on his dash in to Portage Bend.

A few days after he had left Moose Lake behind him, he ran into the first rain-storm of the year. It was heavy, though it did not last long. But the rain seemed to eat away the snow, and though frost followed, the trail grew bad. Huge, gnarled roots, which the snow had hitherto covered, began to jut out on the trail, and frequently Mason's sleigh was jammed so hard between them that he had to help his seven dogs to break it loose. The surface of the trail became icy, slippery, and exceedingly rough, and though Mason had provided himself with moose-hide moccasins for his dogs up at the Stony River Reserve, which he now put on their paws, several of the dogs developed sore feet. Consequently their speed had slowed up considerably. But even so Mason had still hopes of

reaching Portage Bend before break-up started, provided the present cold snap held.

But three days before he was due to arrive at Glengarry Lake a gale sprang up from the south-west, which drove a deluge of rain ahead of it. The trail, already poor enough, now grew tenfold worse. The sleigh hopped and tossed over roots and bumps, and often it scraped for long stretches over almost bare ground. The open muskegs, lakes, and rivers they had to cross were ankle-deep in icy, watery snow-slush.

Although the sleigh was light, the dogs had all they could do to drag it along through the slush and over the bumpy trail, that grew steadily worse. The whole nature seemed to be in a state of general dissolution, and Mason wondered that all the water which was pouring down did not transform the whole earth to a quagmire that would swallow him and his dogs. How he wished now that he had borrowed an oilskin slicker at one of the trading-posts he had passed. His caribou coat, his only protection, swished around him like a wet rag, and he rather suspected that he must look somewhat like a drowned cat. And as protection against the rain the coat was of very little use. He was wet to the skin, and shivered in cold misery. His feet were numb, and felt all but dead, from wading through the icy slush. And the strain and the wet made the dogs peeved and short-tempered, so he had constantly to correct them. The wind died down on the second day, but the rain continued to pour down. Mason changed into comparatively dry clothing at the camp-fire at night; but the following day he was again drenched as soon as they had started.

On the fourth day the miserable, dripping, haggard, and weary procession limped slowly into the Glengarry settlement, and as soon as they arrived Mason knew for a certainty that he had lost the race. Glengarry Lake was covered by a foot or more of water, and the ice under the water was brittle, and was beginning to become porous from the corroding work of the water. Mason did not need the corroborative, emphatic assurances of the population at the settlement to know that he was beaten. Even if he could in some way cross the lake, the trail on the other

side would be almost, if not quite, impassable. It slanted towards the south-east from the south-eastern corner of the lake, and led across numerous swamps, muskegs, lakes, and rivers, where he would be in constant danger of drowning himself and his whole outfit. And before he reached Portage Bend he would have to cross the broad Saskatchewan River twice, and he was pretty certain that it would now prove impossible to cross the river at all. The risks and hazards would be too great to justify the attempt, so, though it was bitter to admit defeat now, when only two days of travel separated him from his goal, he had no other alternative.

His friend, Hamilton, the manager of the Hudson's Bay Company's post, put him up at his house, and both Hamilton and his wife did all they could to make him comfortable. And after all, he was rather thankful for a spell of rest. He had not realized how spent and weary he was till now, when the tension which had kept him going had finally snapped.

Hamilton and the other settlers were of course curious to know why he had left Angus and Grayson behind up in the North. When Grayson and Angus had passed through Glengarry on their way up, they had told that they were to join Mason farther up the trail.

He satisfied their curiosity by telling them that they had found the dead body of a trapper up somewhere around Moose Lake, and that Grayson and Angus were waiting for the rivers and lakes to be trafficable before bringing down the body. But he himself had hurried on to Portage Bend because he knew they were short-handed at the Detachment, and that his presence would be needed there. To their inquiries who the dead trapper was, Mason answered his questioners that his identity had so far not been established. He hated to have to tell these barefaced lies, but he felt it was necessary.

All the inhabitants of the small settlement did all they could to make Mason's enforced stay with them as pleasant as possible. But as the days passed they began to wonder a little at his lack of response to their friendly advances. Not that he was surly or ungracious in any way, but he seemed impatient and restless, and at times quite moody,

and seemed most inclined to go away and brood by himself. And such a state of mind and attitude was so entirely alien to the Mason they had known on previous visits. Then he had always appeared extremely cheerful and sociable. For the first few days they attributed his strange mood to the fatigue and weariness after the hardships he had just gone through on the trail, but when it continued long after he must have quite recovered, they began to wonder.

They could not know, of course, that there were good reasons for Mason's strange mood. He was fretting because while he was held prisoner here, Mary Warner might go around and still hope for her father's safe return, and he felt that it would be much better for her ultimate peace of mind to know the truth as soon as possible in spite of its cruelty. And he was further worried with fear that Smiley might in some way hear about the finding of Warner's body before he could get down and set the wheels of justice going. And if Smiley should hear even the faintest rumour, why, that might mean any amount of trouble. He would certainly make himself scarce and very hard to find. So Mason watched the ice on the lake with growing restlessness and impatience. Often he stood on the shore of the lake and glared at the wide expanse of ice and water as if he hoped to remove the imprisoning barrier by sheer force of will.

But the ice seemed to mock him. As soon as the rain stopped the weather became cool, but not cool enough to harden the rain-soaked surface of the earth sufficient to make a try for a dash to Portage Bend by dog-sleigh possible. It just kept tantalizingly cool enough to retard the melting of the ice.

But gradually the atmosphere began to grow warmer, as the sun grew hotter, and the air began to fill with the odours of spring, while crows cawed their unmelodious hymn of greeting to the spring around the settlement. The snow began to disappear rapidly on the open areas of ground, but under the spruce-trees in the forest it still spread as a greyish, dirty, moth-eaten carpet. It was as if the snow in these screened places was trying to defy and mock advancing spring by a slow, lingering retreat.

But one morning, when Mason had been held a fuming prisoner for more than three weeks, a gale sprang up from the south, which swept the stubborn ice on the lake with a warm blast. And when it abated on the third day the lake was a mass of drifting ice-floes, with open lanes of water between them. The wind veered around to the north-east, and the floes began to drift slowly down the lake and into the river which flowed southward from the lake.

Mason waited two more days and then he decided to start the perilous journey by canoe down to Portage Bend on the following morning. His patience was quite exhausted, and he was willing to face any hazards as long as he got action.

"But listen to reason, Mason!" protested Hamilton, when the corporal told him of his decision. "You hardly have a chance to get through. The river below will probably be packed with ice. And the Saskatchewan will be in flood and full of ice-floes. Your canoe will be smashed to match-wood!"

"I've thought of all that, but I've got to try it," retorted Mason determinedly. "I've simply got to. Just let me have the two best canoe-men you've got around here to go with me, two fellows who are good swimmers, and I think we shall be able to get through."

"But what's your hurry?" expostulated Hamilton. "Why not wait another week, so you can go down safely? Dash it all, man! When you've waited so long, a week or so more can't make any difference. You are risking your life by going now. So do listen to reason."

"I can't wait," answered Mason with finality. "There are reasons why I must get to the Bend as soon as possible. Important reasons. I'm starting to-morrow morning. And if you can't find any men who'll go along with me, I'll start alone."

"Well, I think I can find the men for you. We've got quite a few lads around here as reckless as you. But I'm telling you, Mason, you're taking bigger chances than a man should be allowed to take," remarked Hamilton, shaking his head.

"Never mind that," said Mason a little impatiently.

"I've taken chances before, and got away with them. And I don't intend to gamble too recklessly with the ice. I'm not quite as mad as all that. If I find at any point that it will be too dangerous to go on, I'll make camp and wait till conditions get better. But I want to start to-morrow, because the weather is fine and we have a full moon, so I think we may be able to reach Portage Bend early on the day after to-morrow by pushing on through the night, if the ice doesn't prove to be too bad."

"Gosh, I wouldn't like to take the chances you intend to take. But suit yourself. It's your funeral, not mine. Well, I'll go along and find two good men for you," said Hamilton, when he saw that further remonstrances would be quite useless.

Mason and his two companions started around sunrise on the following morning. The weather was beautiful and warm, and only a gentle breeze was blowing. Mason's companions were two young Indians, who were both expert canoe-men, and good swimmers. It had not taken much persuasion to make them go. As soon as the two lads heard that Mason intended to start alone if he could find no one who dared go with him, they were immediately on their mettle, and declared that if any white man dared to go, so did they.

The trip across the lake was comparatively easy. They found open lanes everywhere between the floes, and though they often had to make tedious detours, which lengthened their journey, they found no actual obstacles.

But at the point where the lake empties itself into Glengarry River, they met their first difficulty. Where the river flows out of the lake it is divided by a small, rocky, spruce-clad island into two arms, which both form rocky rapids. And in these arms the ice was jammed together to a solid, unresisting barrier of ice-floes, which firmly and completely blocked their progress.

They pulled their canoe ashore at this point, and one of the Indians was sent forward to reconnoitre. He soon came back and reported that the river below the island was almost free of ice, and that he had seen no further bar to their progress as far as he had been able to see.

To get down to the open river they had to portage along

the eastern river-arm, where they happened to be. It was a tedious task, as they at several places had to plough through soft, slushy snow with their packs and the canoe. And quite frequently they had to force a passage through clumps of dense brush. But about an hour later they could again launch their canoe on the river below the barrier. A few ice-floes were sailing along on the river, but the main mass was held as in a vice in the two arms above. As Mason looked up at the tons and tons of jagged ice-blocks which towered over them, he hardly dared to think of what would happen if the jam should suddenly give way before they were well out of that dangerous neighbourhood. But luckily the jam held, or else their journey would have come to a sudden, premature end right there.

Their journey down Glengarry River passed without incident, and shortly after noon they reached the point where the river joined the broad Saskatchewan.

They beached their canoe and walked across to the bank of the big river to make a survey of the situation.

Their survey was not reassuring. The river was in flood, as Hamilton had predicted, and the water was about five feet above its normal level. The river swished swiftly past them in a mass of greyish-brown, dirty, cold-looking water, and following the onward rush was an endless chain of ice-floes, some large, some small, but all advancing at the same *tempo*, each floe keeping faithfully step with its immediate neighbours. They advanced silently and soundlessly like an endless procession of phantoms.

The river at this point was roughly five hundred yards wide, but with the noonday sun slanting in the observers' eyes it looked miles across to the other bank.

"She looks more open in the middle, so we'll have to keep to the middle as much as possible," remarked Mason. "But if something should happen to our canoe there, and we have to swim for it, it will be a long, cold swim," he added as an afterthought.

His two companions nodded their heads gravely. They knew as well as Mason himself that even the best and hardest swimmer in the world would have a very slim chance indeed of reaching the bank from the middle of the river, with its icy, swirling waters, and the numerous

ice-floes. But Mason noticed with satisfaction that neither showed the slightest signs of fear or hesitation.

Their chief concern was to get their canoe from the Glengarry River into the Saskatchewan. To carry it over-land and then launch it from the bank of the Saskatchewan was out of the question. The ice-floes formed an almost unbroken, swiftly moving mass along the bank, so before they would have got their canoe launched and under way some ice-floe would with almost dead certainty stave in the frail craft.

After some discussion they finally decided to shoot obliquely down-stream into the Saskatchewan from the mouth of the Glengarry River, and at such a speed that the velocity of their craft would be the same as the ice-floes. Then there would be little danger of having the canoe damaged in any way, even if they should get tangled up with any floes.

They returned to their canoe and at once set out to try their perilous experiment. Their adopted tactics worked, though for some anxious moments, when they first entered the big river, it looked as if they were going to be hopelessly hemmed in by ice-floes without being able to extricate themselves. But by skilful twisting, turning, and dodging they gradually managed to work the canoe farther and farther out into the river, till they at last reached the middle where the ice was sparser.

But even here they could not for a moment relax their vigilance. As they were working their paddles they advanced much more swiftly than the ice, which was slavishly bound to the speed of the water, so they had to keep their eyes unceasingly fixed ahead to avoid collision with floes in their path. Some of these were lying so low in the water that often they could not be seen before the canoe was almost on top of them, so they had innumerable hair-breadth escapes from staving in the prow of their craft. And both banks of the river looked so distressingly far away from where they were gliding along, while the murky waters looked so intensely cold and menacing.

The journey seemed like a nightmare to Mason ever after. The constant vigilance necessary to avoid disaster, and their many narrow escapes, put a heavy strain on their

nerves. More than once Mason's heart was in his mouth, when a catastrophe seemed unavoidable. His fears were not so much for himself as for his companions. After all, he was responsible for enticing them along on this perilous adventure, and he simply did not dare dwell too much on the unpleasant prospect that he might eventually also be responsible for their deaths.

But both his companions were brilliant canoe-men, and they seemed to know exactly how to meet every emergency.

Their worst moments they had at every turn and bend in the river. There the centrifugal force compelled both their craft and the ice with almost irresistible pressure towards the concave bank, and it took all their skill and strength to prevent the canoe from being crushed in the jam. But always they somehow got through these hazards safely, though not quite unscathed. Their canoe had all the paint rubbed off its sides, and was badly scratched and scarred, but none of the scratches were serious. It had also begun to leak a little, but not more than they could easily bail out.

Their meals were less than sketchy during the trip. They had cooked and eaten a hurried meal while they were still on the Glengarry River. But now they did not dare land to cook meals. Their canoe would undoubtedly be smashed to pieces by the ice, either when they landed or when they tried to launch it again. But by a lucky impulse Mason had got Mrs. Hamilton to make a fairly large stack of sandwiches for his grub-box, and these they munched on straight stretches of the river where they could relax a little. For beverage they scooped up the brown, muddy water of the river, and drank it.

When night approached Mason asked his companions if they thought they could stick it out during the night. If they were doubtful, they would have to try to beach the canoe somewhere. But he warned them that if they did, it would be more than doubtful whether they would have a canoe to continue in the next morning. On the other hand, if they continued through the night they would probably reach Portage Bend some time around daybreak. And then it wouldn't matter a hang if their canoe got smashed to matchwood in landing.

His companions answered gamely and stoutly that they were both willing and eager to see the thing through to its finish now they had got so far. And they would not hear of breaking the journey. And so they continued into the night. The moon was full and bright. But even bright moonlight often plays tricks with one's vision, and ice-floes, which in the daylight would have been clearly visible, now often were undistinguishable till it was all but too late to avoid them. So their alertness had to be doubled. And the weary travellers strained their eyes till they ached. But even so they could not avoid bumping into ice-floes now and then, but luckily the bumps were never serious.

They were only about four miles away from their goal when disaster at last overtook them. The moon hung low on the horizon, but a brightening streak on the dark sky to the east heralded the approach of daylight. They had just rounded a bend, when suddenly they discovered to their horror a solid barrier of ice only about five hundred yards ahead of them. The barrier stretched from bank to bank without a break, and glistened cold and menacingly in the moonlight.

This barrier had formed at a point where the river narrows between rocky banks, and where the water rushes over a series of low and otherwise innocuous rapids. Neither Mason nor the Indians had dreamt that any barrier would form at this point, though they all knew the river well. With the river in flood they had taken it for granted that the ice would pass easily over the rapids without becoming entangled. But now the inexplicable had happened, and the solid barrier was there to prove that their reasoning had been at fault in this case.

But something had to be done, and done quickly. Obviously the water found some way under the barrier, because its speed was not discernibly slowed up by the ragged, serrated wall of ice ahead. In a few moments the canoe must be dashed against the ice-pile if the occupants did not succeed in bringing it to the shore.

"Make for the left bank!" howled Mason frantically. "The bank slopes there, and is sandy! Too steep and

muddy on other bank! Jump when I shout, and try to lift the canoe out with us! "

The canoe was immediately headed obliquely towards the left bank, and the three men worked their paddles with frenzied fury. All the time the river inexorably and swiftly carried them nearer and nearer to the ominous, jagged barrier. They forced their way recklessly between the ice-floes, which grew denser as they neared the bank. They clutched their paddles so hard that their knuckles whitened, the paddle-blades churned the water, and they almost lifted their craft forward at each stroke. They simply had to make the bank. If the canoe was smashed against the barrier at the speed they were now going, they would probably be knocked unconscious, and would drown.

How they ever succeeded in forcing their way through the ice-pack always afterwards appeared like a miracle to them all, but at last the prow of the canoe scraped against land.

"Jump!" yelled Mason, and like one man they splashed into the shallow water at the foot of the bank. They turned around while they were still on the jump to grab the canoe; but before they could lay hands on it there was a grinding, rending "Crash!" and a huge ice-floe tossed their craft up on the gently sloping bank, a broken, shattered wreck.

"It served us well, and deserved a better fate than this," muttered Mason, as he and his companions stood ruefully regarding the crushed remains of their canoe.

"Anyhow, we saved our lives and all our stuff, so after all we've reason to be grateful."

"What we do now?" asked one of the Indians practically.

"We'll go along to the Indian village a mile down this bank, just below the rapids. You fellows can stay there and rest. But I have to hoof it in to the Bend," answered Mason.

"Then we boil a kettle first, an' eat, eh?" suggested the other of his companions.

"Not for me. If I sit down now, I shouldn't be able to get up again," said Mason with a wry smile. "So I have to keep going. You fellows can eat when you get down to the village, and then roll in for a good, long

snooze. You've deserved it. We'll take our bedding and stuff along with us to the village."

The shipwrecked trio created quite a stir down in the village. The villagers were all asleep when they arrived, but after they had knocked at the door of the chief's house for a while, and the dogs in the village had started to register their loud-voiced protests against this early morning intrusion, lights soon began to appear in the cabins, and curious villagers came to the doors of their dwellings to make inquiries.

When the chief at last opened his door to their persistent knocking, the travellers were already surrounded by a small crowd of men, and when the latter heard that the trio had come down the ice-filled rivers from Glengarry Lake their amazement, respect, and admiration were unstinted and unconcealed. Mason's companions were almost bursting with pride. They felt that this open, unanimous praise from people who were all experts with canoes quite made up for all the hardships they had endured during the journey.

Mason left them in the kindly hands of their hero-worshipping kinsmen, and set off on foot for the town. By the twisting river the distance was about three miles, but the trail through the bush was not more than two miles long. But he found they were the longest two miles he had ever walked in his life. He had nothing to carry, as he had left his kit with the villagers, who had promised to bring it in to the Barracks later in the day. But even so he felt as if he was struggling along under a heavy load.

For long distances he had to wade through slush and mud. He wore rubber over-shoes over his moccasins, but the slush often went over the tops of the protecting rubber shoes. But as he was wet to the waist already from jumping into the water when they abandoned their canoe, the fact did not really add so very much to his discomforts.

His feet moved almost automatically, and his brain felt heavy, and at times played queer tricks on him. Several times he seemed to see shacks in the grey dawn in the forest, where he knew that there were no shacks. But he merely shook his head to free his mind of these periodical hallucinations, and kept on plodding.

At last, just as the sun rose over the tree-tops, he reached the Indian Reserve opposite the town, and now all he had to do was to cross the bridge, and then he would soon be home.

He was glad it was too early for people to be abroad, when he at last reached the streets of Portage Bend. He knew that he must present a rather sorry, bedraggled sight, wet and weary as he was. In spite of his most determined efforts he could not keep himself from stumbling and reeling in his step now and then. If he had met any townspeople, they would probably have thought he was homeward bound after a more than usually hectic and bibulous party, he told himself with a grim smile.

There was no life around the Barracks when he arrived, so he hammered on the door. Soon he heard a sleepy voice grumbling on the other side of the door, the door was unlocked and opened, and Constable Ross, wearing pyjamas and an unfriendly look on his face, peered out at the intruder.

"Jiimmy!" he gasped, the expression on his face changing to a picture of amazement. "Where on earth do you spring from?"

"Let me in. I'm half dead," croaked Mason. "I'll tell you as soon as I've got my breath."

"Certainly, old pal. Come in, come in. You look like a ghost. Come right along and sit down. You look as if you need it."

The other occupants of the barrack-room were awake when Mason staggered in and sank wearily down on his bed with a deep sigh of relief. There were two of them, Constable Bremner and Constable MacGregor from Prince Albert, who had been sent up to the Detachment for temporary duty during Mason's and Grayson's absence.

From their beds they both stared with incredulous eyes at the haggard vision.

"Good Lord! It's Corporal Mason," they exclaimed in unison. "Where on earth do you come from?"

"You fellows stow your gab!" ordered Ross angrily. "Don't you see the corporal is all in, and can't answer your fool questions?"

"It's all right, Ross," murmured Mason. "I feel almost up to scratch again, now I'm sitting down. I was a bit tired, that was all. I got caught by the break-up at Glengarry Lake a little over three weeks ago. Two Indians and I left there yesterday morning in a canoe. An ice-jam had formed up at those rapids four miles above here, and our canoe was smashed all to Hades when we tried to beach it above the jam. So I hoofed it the rest of the way in."

His audience stared at him, round-eyed with amazement.

"Do you mean to say that you and those madmen with you came down in a canoe from Glengarry through the ice-choked rivers?" demanded Ross, staring at Mason as if he were something out of a freak-show.

"Well, yes. It was really not so bad."

"Oh, no. Not at all. Just a picnic, as it were," snorted Ross sarcastically. "Good Lord, man! I just spoke to one of the best canoe-men among the Indians yesterday, and he said that it would be more than a week before it would be possible for any canoe to come down from above. You certainly must have been taking some tall chances! It would have served you right if you had gone and got yourself drowned."

"Thank you for them kind sentiments," murmured Mason with a tired smile. "But the chances were not so big as you seem to think."

"But what about Grayson and Angus?" asked Bremner. "Where are they?"

"Somewhere up around Moose Lake, I should think. They're waiting up there somewhere till the lakes and rivers are open. They're bringing down Warner's body."

"Good Lord! So you did find his body?" said Ross eagerly. "How had he died?"

"Been murdered. Knifed to death. But that is a matter you chaps will have to keep strictly to yourselves. Not a murmur about it must leak out. Understand?"

His listeners nodded their heads gravely.

"Any clue to the murderer?" asked Ross.

"Yes. I think we found a red-hot clue. But I can't tell you more till after I've seen the Inspector. Will one of you please go and ring him up and tell him I have

arrived. I'm too tired to move at present. Don't say anything about Warner, except that our suspicions have been verified. I don't trust those dames at the exchange too far. They might easily let something leak out if they listen in."

"Right oh. I'll go and phone him," said Ross, and walked off to the office.

They heard his ring, and heard the murmur of his voice after a short wait. Presently he appeared in the door, a wide grin on his face.

"I certainly startled our Inspector out of his usual calm, for a change," he announced gleefully. "It sounded as if he almost dropped the receiver in his amazement when I told him that you had arrived here by canoe. He shouted 'What!' so loudly that he almost busted my eardrum. He asked me if you had had breakfast yet, and if not, if you were too fagged out to come over to his house for breakfast."

"I really haven't had an honest meal since breakfast yesterday at Glengarry, so his invitation sounds like sweet music to my ears," said Mason with a grin. "Dam' decent of him to ask me. Tell him I'll be right over as soon as I've had a wash and a change of clothes. I'll be about my own self by then, I expect."

"Right oh," said Ross, and returned to the telephone.

Half an hour later Mason presented himself at the Inspector's house. He had had a thorough wash and shave, and had changed into dry clothes from the skin outwards. His comrades in the barrack-room had insisted on acting as a sort of corps of valets during his ablutions and dressing, much to his secret annoyance and embarrassment, and involving much unnecessary confusion. But as he had recognized the real spirit of affection which prompted these efforts, he had suffered them in silence. He felt much refreshed when his toilet was at last completed, and except for a heaviness in the eyelids he was actually almost his own self, as he had earlier prophesied.

The Inspector received him very kindly.

"Glad to see you back, 'Mason,'" he said, as he shook his subordinate's hand heartily. "And you look remarkably fit too. But you ought to be court-martialled or something sticky like that for trying issue with the rivers as they

are now," he added with a smile. "You are lucky to escape with your life and limbs still intact after a fool-hardy adventure like that."

"I simply had to get down as soon as I could, sir," answered Mason. "I have an awful lot of important matters to report. As it was, I had to kick my heels around Glengarry Lake for over three weeks. And I was almost desperate by that time, sir."

"You've done very well indeed, Mason," said the Inspector kindly. "And as far as I could gather from Ross's guarded remarks over the telephone, you found Joe Warner dead?" he asked more seriously.

"Yes, sir. He had been murdered. Knifed through the heart."

"Poor girl," murmured Weston softly, thinking of Mary Warner. "It will be an awful shock for her. She will have to be told at once, of course."

"Yes, sir. I expect it will be a terrible shock," agreed Mason miserably, thinking how that shock would repercuss on him.

"Well, you can tell me your whole story after we have had some grub. Breakfast is waiting. I suppose you feel rather peckish?"

"I must admit I do, sir," answered Mason a little diffidently. "I've only had a few sandwiches and river-water since noon yesterday."

"Good Lord, man! You must be half starved. Come straight along to the dining-room."

Betty Weston was already in her place at the breakfast-table when they entered. She received Mason as if he had been her own son, and Mason's heart warmed at this cordial reception. He apologized for routing them out of bed at such an unseemly hour, but his apologies were waved airily aside.

Betty Weston was horribly shocked when she heard that Warner had been murdered, and during the meal she seemed preoccupied with reflections of her own.

But Mason, at least, did not notice her abstraction. He had really not known how hungry he was till he started eating. Occasionally during the meal he cast surreptitious glances towards his hostess and host to see if they noticed

the scandalous quantities of provender he absorbed. But neither of them seemed to notice anything unusual or abnormal about his appetite, he saw to his satisfaction.

As soon as Mason had reached the stage where he definitely refused further nourishment, Inspector Weston rose from the table.

"Well, Mason," he said. "We'll go into the sitting-room and start our pipes going, and then you can tell me your story."

"Oh, Dick. Do you mind if I come in and listen?" asked Betty. "I've a special reason for wanting to hear it all."

Weston looked keenly at her.

"I think that will be perfectly all right," he said.

"But you must remember that it is all secret and very confidential, so to speak. What do you say, Mason?"

"It will be perfectly all right as far as I am concerned, sir," answered Mason promptly.

So as soon as the two men had their pipes going Mason began his story. He told it simply and concisely, and in straightforward language. But even so, he held the close attention of his audience throughout.

He passed quickly over the opening stages of his long quest. The Inspector had heard most of that over the telephone from Prince Albert, and from Mason's official report.

But all that had happened after he left Prince Albert was news to his audience. So from that point on he gave a more detailed account.

He related how he had picked up Grayson and Angus at Charley's Place, according to schedule. Then he described their long journey up to Stony River Reserve, and told how they had been held up by that annoying blizzard at the mouth of Stony River. Then he recounted the information Chief John Black Bear had imparted, and which had confirmed Mason's theories beyond a doubt. He told how the chief had decided to go with them, and described their trip up to the claim, and what had occurred there.

There was a solemn hush in the room when Mason told about the discovery of Warner's body. As he spoke Betty Weston's eyes filled with tears, and she shuddered in spite of herself during the brief, but graphic, description. Then

Mason described briefly his own dash for Portage Bend, how the weather had defeated him at Glengarry Lake, and finally he gave a short account of his canoe-trip from Glengarry, and its untimely end up by the ice-barrier.

During the recital Weston had several times nodded his head in emphatic approval, and when the corporal had finished he spoke:

"You've done very well, Mason," he said. "Very well indeed. And I think I can promise you that the astuteness, energy, and zeal you have displayed throughout will not go unrewarded," he added with a smile. "And Angus and Grayson will be all right, I know. Angus is a careful general. But I suppose we won't see them for another month or so. I suppose you brought along the chips you collected up at the claim?"

"Yes, sir," answered Mason, shoving his hand into the inside pocket of his tunic, from which he produced four small packets sewn up in oilskin. "Here they are. I took the precaution to sew them up in double layers of oilskin up at Glengarry, just in case we would have a spill coming down," he explained with a smile.

"And a very sensible idea too," said Weston, picking up the packages, and putting them in his own pocket. "I'll have a couple of the boys get busy on piecing them together as soon as I get to the office. I'll take a hand myself, if I'm not kept too busy. I always had a childish interest in jigsaw puzzles. Of course, you'll be off duty for the rest of the day, Corporal. You need a good snooze and a rest. Oh, by the way. What are the initials of that man Smiley?"

Mason pulled out his note-book and flickered the leaves till he got to a certain page.

"J. A. Smiley, sir," he announced.

"Right." Weston quickly made a note of the name and initials. "And you had better give me the copy you made of the inscription after you had assembled the chips. It will help the boys. Thanks. Now, according to Warner's last letter to his daughter this man Smiley is a resident of Winnipeg, and in all probability he is some broker or real-estate shark. I remember Warner mentioned in his letter that his companion was known to be interested in mining

and mining property. But I'll have another look at the letter. I've got it at the office. And I'll get in touch with the Winnipeg Police at once, and have them check up on all the J. A. Smileys in that city. There can't be so many. If they find one who was absent from the city from the middle of November to the end of December, or thereabout, he'll probably be our man. Of course, even so, we can't arrest him. But if we can secure some samples of his hand-writing, and they click with the writing on the blaze from the stake you brought down, we've got enough evidence for arrest and questioning. And I suppose Mac-Donald and Bancroft could identify him?"

"I should think so, sir. At least Charley up at Charley's Place, you know, was sure he should be able to recognize him. And then there are the two fellows who saw Warner and his companion on the trail."

"Yes. I think we've got enough people who can identify him, when we first get him. That should make matters rather easy. However, we'll have to wait and see what the Winnipeg Police can do first." He thought for a moment, and suddenly his face clouded. "Oh, I forgot," he continued glumly. "Of course, I'll have to get Miss Warner on the long-distance telephone as soon as I get to the office, and tell her about this dreadful business. That is going to be an exceedingly hard and unpleasant duty."

"No, you don't need to phone, Dick," said Betty. "I had made up my mind to go down and break the news to her myself, as soon as I heard of her father's tragic death. That was really why I wanted to hear the corporal's story, so that I could give her a full account of what had happened. To-day is Saturday, and the train is going out at two o'clock. So I shall be in Horton around seven to-night. I'll be back on Monday."

"An excellent idea, my dear," said Weston with a sigh of relief. "In a case like this a woman is always much better at handling things than a man. But wouldn't it be better if the corporal went down with you? She might like to hear the story from his own lips, and that sort of thing."

"Yes, I think that would be a very good idea," agreed Betty. "I could go and see her alone first, to break the dreadful news to her. And later, after she gets over her

first shock, she could have a talk with the corporal, and get all the details. But perhaps you're too tired to go along, Corporal? "

Mason grew highly embarrassed and confused at this suggestion. He had long ago come to the firm conclusion that all his dreams about Mary Warner would only remain futile dreams. And he was even willing to go further, and admit to himself that his dreams had been extremely foolish, and that there had not been a vestige of justification for them whatever. He had grappled so often with this subject up in the woods, and especially during his enforced stay up at Glengarry Lake. And he had finally convinced himself that any hopes he had cherished with regard to her had merely been a chimera, and that it would be far better for his peace of mind if he never saw her again, but tried to forget her. And the mere idea of facing her now with this story, on top of his letter from Prince Albert, made him quail. He had found no answer to that letter of his down at the Barracks, and that proved that his fears about her reaction to it were quite justified. She would only look on him with scorn as the man who had failed her after his high and confident promises. No. It would be far better to stay away from her.

"But, Mrs. Weston, wouldn't it be rather cruel? I mean, after all, I was the man who found her father's body. And—and I think it would bring the whole tragedy closer to her if she was to hear the story from me, as it were," he stammered. "I—I really think it would be much better if you told her everything, and that she didn't see me at all, if you see what I mean."

"Yes, I understand what you mean, Corporal. But I don't think you need worry about that. Mary Warner is too sensible a girl to be unduly morbid, and that sort of thing," remarked Betty Weston. "But of course I'll know more about that after I've seen her. If I think it is better that you don't see her just for the present, well, you can just remain in the background, and I won't even tell her that you are with me. But I think she would like to see you, and hear the whole story from your own lips. So if you feel up to it, I should be very glad if you would come along."

"Oh, as far as that goes, I shall be quite all right after I've had a few hours' sleep," he said with some hesitation. "But . . ." He paused and thought for a moment. "All right, Mrs. Weston," he said suddenly. "I'll go along, since you want me to. I'll be at the station at two o'clock. And now, if you don't mind, I'll go back to the Barracks and catch up with some sleep. I'm afraid I'm beginning to feel rather drowsy," he explained apologetically.

"Oh, but you aren't going back to the Barracks, Mason," said Weston. "We decided before you arrived that you were to sleep right here. One of the spare bed-rooms has already been prepared for you."

"Oh, but really, sir. That's quite unnecessary," protested Mason with considerable embarrassment. "My bed in the barrack-room will do me quite well."

"No, it won't," smiled Weston. "Remember, it's not so very many years ago since I myself was an occupant of that selfsame barrack-room. And I know from past, bitter experience, that it's impossible to snatch even a few winks of sleep in that room during the day-time, with people constantly coming and going in the building, and with all the talking going on. So you'll stay right here."

"But, sir, I've got no pyjamas, or tooth-brush, and that sort of thing," stammered Mason, trying to make a last stand. He considered that he had already trespassed too far on the Westons' hospitality.

"Don't let little things like that bother you, my lad," laughed Weston. "There's a pair of my pyjamas laid out in your room, and I'll send one of the boys over with tooth-brush, comb, hair-brush, and the rest of the paraphernalia during the forenoon, so you'll find them all here when you wake up."

"Well, sir, I'm very grateful to Mrs. Weston and you for your kindness; but it's really too much to put you to all this trouble," stammered Mason diffidently.

"No trouble at all," said Betty Weston, with a smile. "We're glad to have you stay with us."

"Quite," agreed Weston. "And besides," he added with a grin. "You know that it's up to me to keep this Detachment up to the highest state of efficiency. And the better I look after you chaps, the more efficient you'll be."

It's really mere egotism on my part to keep you fit, so don't run away with the idea that I'm doing you a favour. Well, I must run along, and get the Winnipeg Police started on their hunt for Mr. Smiley. And then the boys and I will settle down to our jigsaw-puzzles. I'll get the railway-tickets for you. Sleep well, Corporal."

CHAPTER XIV

MASON awoke shortly after eleven o'clock from a sound, undisturbed sleep, and after a hot bath he felt quite normal again. His recent hardships were now only memories of the past.

Mrs. Weston insisted that he have an early dinner with them, in spite of his protests, which were overruled.

Immediately after dinner he walked over to the Barracks to pack his grip. There he found his late canoe-companions waiting for him. They were wreathed in wide grins. They had just finished a detailed description of their epic canoe-journey to an admiring audience, which comprised the full strength of the constables, and they obviously felt like conquering heroes. Mason left them in the care of the other members of the Detachment, who would see to it that they were well looked after during their stay in town, and who would also make arrangements for their return journey to Glengarry Lake.

He then quickly tossed a few necessary articles into his grip, explained briefly to his comrades that the Inspector was sending him off on a tour of duty, and departed.

He caught up with the Westons on his way to the depot, and when they arrived there he was glad that he was under the Inspector's wing. As usual, the townspeople had turned out in force to watch the enthralling spectacle of the train pulling out, and Mason noticed lively surprise at his appearance in the faces of his acquaintances, who formed the majority of those crowding the platform. He detected behind their friendly nods and greetings a burning, almost overwhelming desire to advance the questions: When? How? From where? But the Inspector's and Mrs. Weston's presence with him put an effective check on their voracious curiosity, which had to go unassuaged.

Mason found the railway-journey unexpectedly pleasant. On the uncountable occasions when he had travelled on the train from Portage Bend he had generally been bored to distraction; but nobody could be bored with Betty Weston as a companion. She kept on a running cheerful conversation on almost every subject under the sun except "shop". She retailed the happenings at Portage Bend during Mason's long absence, and adorned her accounts with humorous comments and observations. She also brought him up to date about the happenings in the great outside world, and discussed topics in which she knew from old that Mason was interested. And she kept him so interested that his perplexities with regard to the object of their journey were actually pushed into the background for the time being.

They had to wait for about an hour at Portage Junction for the Winnipeg-Prince Albert train. They spent that hour by taking a walk out on the rolling prairie south of the town, enjoying the bright sunshine and bracing spring air.

They arrived at Horton shortly before seven o'clock. They had taken their supper on the train, so after having reserved rooms at the one and only hotel the little town boasted, The Horton House, Mrs. Weston set out to find Miss Warner, after having obtained the necessary directions from the hotel clerk.

Mason awaited her return in the hotel lounge. It was not a cheerful place. It was typical of all the lounges in western small-town hotels. There was a reception desk opposite the entrance-door, at one end regaled with a glass case displaying cigars, cigarettes, and tobacco of doubtful quality. There was a long table on which were laid out newspapers of somewhat ancient vintage. Along the walls stood at intervals all-wood armchairs with cuspidors placed at tactical points, and within easy ranging-distance from the chairs. Two electric bulbs in the ceiling provided the illumination.

At one end of the elongated room a swinging door lead into the bar-room. The air of the lounge was permeated with the lingering odours of cheap cigars, inferior tobacco, and a mixture of fumes from beer and liquors, which seeped in from the bar.

Mason felt exceedingly restless and nervous in this

depressing atmosphere. He divided his time between wandering aimlessly around the room, looking at the cheap and not particularly decorative oleographs and advertising posters adorning the wall, and trying to read some of the newspapers. But he found it impossible to concentrate long enough to read more than a few lines before his mind started rambling. At one moment he hoped fervently that Mary Warner would decline to see him, but the next he rather wished that she would not.

He was not the only occupant of the room. The majority of the chairs were occupied by local gentlemen, who, according to long-established custom and habit, invaded the hotel lounge at night to check up on new arrivals in town and to find out their business there. Some of these men were bewhiskered, and some looked as if they intended to be clean-shaven, but that they had mislaid their razor for a few days. But they were all of them lean, with sharp, hatchet-like faces, and bright, inquisitive eyes. Presumably the fat men in the community were too lazy to be curious.

A few of these gentlemen tried to entice the corporal into conversation in order to fish for information, but Mason firmly, though courteously, made it quite plain to them that he was not in the mood for confidential chats. And this reluctance of his led the town gossips to decide on the spot that some hitherto unsuspected and undetected crime must have been uncovered by the police in their home-town, and that the corporal had been sent down to investigate. Mounties had very seldom visited their town except in the line of duty.

The gossips gradually drifted together into groups in corners, where low-voiced discussion took place. The subject-matter of this earnest discussion was the probable nature of the crime and its perpetrator.

A list of suspects was readily and easily compiled. The names of the three or four of the town's notorious black sheep were freely quoted with the marginal note in each case that: "I wouldn't of been a mite surprised if he's got hisself into a mess at last!" But as they had not even a nebulous theory on which to build a case, they were consequently unable to pin the "mess" on any particular

individual. And this irked and annoyed them considerably. They felt that the corporal should at least unbend enough to supply them with a working foundation for theories. One bewhiskered gentleman in rather dirty overalls, who rhythmically masticated a chew of tobacco of generous proportions, delivered himself of the following oration: "Them Mounties think themselves such tin gods on wheels that they walk aroun' with their noses stuck in the air, an' don't think they owe us nothin'. They forget they's servants of the tax-payers, which same is us. An' they sure should be obligated to tell us what's goin' on, when anything happens." That the speaker was an incurable loafer from choice and disposition, who had never paid one cent of taxes in his life, did not appear to spoil the logic of his argument, as it was heartily endorsed by his listeners.

But Mason was quite oblivious of this undercurrent of resentment against him. Nor would it have worried him unduly if he had been aware of it. The mental attitude of the gaffers around him did not interest him in the slightest just then. He felt exceedingly glum, miserable, and nervous, and he awaited Mrs. Weston's return in a fever of trepidation. He reflected that this must be about how a prisoner in the dock must feel when he is awaiting the return of the jury with their verdict, and he knew that for the future he would feel more sympathetic towards the prisoner.

It seemed hours before Mrs. Weston returned. Actually she was back within an hour.

She led Mason over to a quiet corner of the room, where they were out of hearing of the corps of loafers, who watched them with undisguised interest. Mrs. Weston's appearance, and her and the corporal's huddle in a quiet spot for an obvious exchange of confidences, added new fuel to their already flaming curiosity. Mrs. Weston's appearance on the stage had added a new angle to the problem, which was already unduly vexing their minds, and they felt that it was now becoming more mysterious and intriguing than ever. And they were all of the unanimous opinion that they were treated exceedingly scurvily and unfairly by being left entirely and absolutely in the dark.

After all, it was their town, and strangers had no right to come in and compound riddles for them to worry about. Nossir! No right at all!

In the meantime Mrs. Weston was saying to Mason:

"The poor girl was very brave, and took the dreadful news remarkably well. But then, she told me that she had felt quite convinced for some time that her father was dead, so she was prepared for the message. But what did come as a terrible shock to her was, that her father had been murdered. She wants to see you, Corporal, and wants to hear the whole story from your own lips."

"Very well, Mrs. Weston. I'll get my hat and go right over with you," said Mason with grave resignation.

"But I'm not going with you. You'll have to go alone."

"Oh, but really, Mrs. Weston. I really couldn't go alone," stammered Mason, aghast. "I mean, Miss Warner might get terribly cut up, when I tell her the story. And it would really be far better if you were on hand."

"You needn't be afraid that she will go into hysterics, if that's what you are hinting at. Mary Warner is not the hysterical kind of person," said Mrs. Weston with a little, grave smile. "And besides, I've already broken the news to her, so she will now be steeled against further shocks. No, you must go alone. You must remember that your story will in a way be her last communion with her dead, and she would certainly not want any unnecessary audience present at a moment like that. I'm afraid I'm expressing myself rather badly, but I think you'll understand what I mean. At least, I told her that I was going to send you over alone, and she seemed to find that quite natural."

"Yes, I see what you mean, Mrs. Weston. But, really, I rather dread the idea of going over there alone," said Mason unhappily.

"I know it's not a pleasant task, but this is the only way it can be done. So you had better go straight over, and get it over with." Then Mrs. Weston gave him instructions as to how to find Miss Warner's house.

Mason felt very glum and dispirited as he walked along the quiet streets, which were only lighted at rather long intervals by electric bulbs on poles. He both dreaded and hated the task ahead of him, and though he saw the justice

in Mrs. Weston's arguments, he nevertheless had a grudging feeling that she had left him in the lurch.

It was perhaps well that Mrs. Weston had given him detailed and explicit directions how to reach his destination, as he was so deeply sunk in his own gloomy reflections that he later on admitted to himself that he must have followed those directions quite subconsciously. At least it came quite as a surprise to him when he suddenly realized that he must be standing in front of Miss Warner's home.

In the dim light from a lamp farther up the street he saw before him a small one-story, white frame-cottage with a gable window over the porch. In front was a small garden plot separated from the wooden sidewalk by a white picket-fence. Dim light seeped through the drawn blinds of the cottage and gave it a homely, cosy look.

Yes, this must be the house, decided Mason, after a look around the neighbourhood. It was all exactly as Mrs. Weston had described it.

For one panicky moment he had an almost irresistible impulse to turn around and hurry away. He considered it almost a crime to break in on the calm serenity of that home with his grim, ghastly story. But almost as soon as the desire had registered on his mind, he took a firm grip on himself and conquered his momentary cowardice. He opened the small gate in the picket-fence and walked with firm steps up the short path through the garden, and mounted the steps to the porch.

He found a small brass knocker on the door, which he rattled.

Almost immediately the door opened, and Mary Warner stood before him.

"How are you, Corporal," she said, holding out her hand. "I am so glad to see you back safely." She smiled at him; but Mason could see that strong emotion was quivering behind the smile.

"How-do-you-do, Miss Warner. Awfully sorry to come here on such a sad errand," said Mason nervously, shaking her hand. "I—I can't say how dreadfully sorry I feel about it all. And you certainly have all my sympathy." His words sounded extremely trite and banal to his ears, but it was all he could think of saying.

"Thank you," said Miss Warner, simply and gravely.
"But please come in."

She led the way into a comfortable sitting-room. A shaded stand-lamp cast a soft light about the room, which added to its cosy appearance.

As soon as they were seated, she in the corner of a chesterfield, he in an armchair, facing her, she said:

"First, I want to thank you for all you have done for me."

"Oh, really. I have done nothing at all," deprecated Mason.

"Mrs. Weston gave me quite another impression," she continued with a little smile. "Perhaps you think it is nothing to brave the frozen North for months, and to be exposed to all sorts of hazards, hardships, and dangers; but I do. And so, evidently, does Mrs. Weston, from what she said. I think you have been perfectly splendid. And Mrs. Weston also told me that you risked your life in the ice-filled rivers to get down as quickly as possible with the message to me about finding—Dad," she ended with a catch in her throat.

Mason fidgeted uneasily in his chair. He felt that he was receiving quite undeserved and unearned commendation. And he hurried to set matters right.

"No, no. Really!" he protested. "Mrs. Weston must have exaggerated. I really did not go through any hardships whatever, nor was I ever in any danger. That trip down the rivers was nothing at all. I mean, we were never at any time in danger of our lives. I was only so sorry that I had to bring you such distressing and shocking news," he added gently.

"Yes, it was a terrible shock," she said gravely. "But then I was in a way prepared for it. Ever from the time I had that peculiar dream I told you about, I felt sure that something dreadful had happened to Dad, and that he was dead. But, of course, I still hoped that he might be all right. But when I got your letter from Prince Albert, I knew that my intuition had been right, and that further hopes were futile."

"Oh, about that letter, Miss Warner. I'm sorry I had to write it," said Mason hurriedly. "For a while I didn't

know what to do. I didn't want to distress you, but on the other hand I didn't want you to entertain false hopes. You see, at that time I felt certain that I should not find your father alive. I'm sorry if my letter hurt you, but I tried to do what I considered best under the circumstances."

"You did quite right. It would have been worse if I had continued going around hoping. As it was, I was prepared when the shock at last came, so it had lost much of its power to hurt. So I am grateful to you for your letter. I didn't answer it, because I felt certain that you would come down to see me when you returned, so that I could thank you in person for all you had done. But now, will you please tell me your story? Please tell me everything."

Her words had been a great relief to Mason. Evidently he had done the right thing when he wrote that letter from Prince Albert, which had so worried him. Obviously he had been tormenting himself for months quite without the slightest reason.

His mind did not linger on these reflections, however. He plunged immediately into the story of his quest.

He started his story at the point where Grayson and Angus had left him up at Beaver Narrows. The events which had occurred before then he had already related to her in the letter he sent down for her from Beaver Narrows with Grayson.

The story was practically the same he had told the Westons that morning.

Mary Warner listened to him with grave attention, but when he reached the point where he told about the finding of Warner's body, tears began to well up in her eyes and course down her cheeks. She pressed her handkerchief to her eyes, and suddenly her whole body was shaken by sobs.

Mason broke off, aghast. He cursed himself for being such a fool as to plump clumsily out with this ghastly description. He ought to have shown more tact.

Suddenly Mary Warner threw herself sideways over the arm-rest of the chesterfield, and lay there a sobbing, pathetic picture of acute grief.

This violent outbreak of grief was more than Mason could stand. He jumped out of his chair, and stepped over

to her, and there he stood staring helplessly down at her, quite at a loss what to do. She looked so much like a hurt child as she was lying there racked with sobs.

"Please don't cry," he stammered stupidly. "I—I know it is all very terrible. But please don't cry. I can't stand to see you like this."

"I—I——" she began, but a fresh paroxysm of sobs choked her words.

Mason bent down and patted her gently on the back.

"There, there," he murmured soothingly, as if he were speaking to a child. "You must be brave. You will only make yourself ill, crying like this. I know how you feel, but really, you must try to be brave."

How he wished Mrs. Weston had been there. She would have known what to do. All he could think of was to continue to pat her back and murmur: "There, there," like a parrot. He was feeling furious with Mrs. Weston and himself at that painful moment.

Suddenly she began to speak in a muffled voice from the arm-rest, her words broken by sobs:

"It—it isn't really the fact that—that poor father is— is dead, that I think so—so terrible. It—it is the fact that he—he was brutally murdered. Poor old Dad was always so—so kind and gentle, and would never hurt anybody. And—and then to be done to death in such a—a horrible manner. And—and then left in the woods like— like a dog, the prey of wild beasts. I—I told Mrs. Weston that I wanted to go up to—to Portage Bend when they brought him back, to—to have a last look at him. But—but she told me I'd bet—better not. And—and I know enough about the forest to—to know what that means. It—it's really too horrible to think that a kind old man, who—who didn't have an—an enemy in the world, an—and who had never hurt anybody should be murdered so—so brutally."

She stopped, her body again shaken by violent sobbing.

"Yes. It was a terrible and brutal act," said Mason, his own voice not quite steady. "But even so you must try to be brave. I feel sure that if your father could speak to you now, he would say the same thing."

"Yes, I—I know. Dad always told me to keep my—

my chin up, what—whatever knocks the world dealt me. But—but I never thought I should be dealt a—a knock like this."

But the mere matter of talking seemed to help her to get a grip on herself. Gradually her sobbing lost its violence, and a little later she sat up, dabbing at her eyes with her handkerchief.

"I'm so sorry. I'm afraid I made a fool of myself," she said, trying bravely to smile through her tears. "I—I'm afraid my self-control was not quite as strong as I thought it was. But when you told me about finding—Dad, the whole picture seemed at once to stand out so vividly that—that I simply lost my head for a moment. You must please forgive me."

"There is nothing at all to forgive," said Mason, looking gravely down at her. "It was my fault. I ought to have known that—that, well that that particular part of my narrative would hurt you deeply, so I ought to have used more discretion. But I am afraid I was more absorbed in the story than I imagined, and forgot. So I must really ask you to forgive me for hurting you."

"No, it was my own fault. I wanted you to tell me the whole story, only I didn't expect it would come as quite such a shock. At least, I thought I should be able to keep my feelings under better control. But I'm quite all right now, so please continue your story."

"Are you sure that you'll be able to stand it?" asked Mason a little anxiously. "I have caused you enough distress already, so perhaps it would be better if I told you the rest some other time."

"No. I want to hear it now, please. And don't worry. I shan't break down again."

"Well, if you think it will be all right, I shall continue, of course," said Mason. He walked back to his chair and sat down.

He then told her the last chapters of the story, and ended by giving a short description of the canoe-journey down from Glengarry Lake. The way he described the trip it sounded as if it had been merely an ordinary picnic jaunt. He finished with these words: ". . . and early this morning we found the river blocked by an ice-barrier,

which had formed in some rapids a few miles above Portage Bend, and so we landed there and I walked into town. And as soon as I told my story to the Inspector and Mrs. Weston, they decided that Mrs. Weston and I should come down together to break the sad news to you."

"That was very, very kind and thoughtful of the Westons," she said earnestly. "They are really charming people. And such wonderful friends. But to return for a moment to your story, you said just now that you landed above the ice-barrier. Mrs. Weston told me that your canoe was crushed by the ice, and completely wrecked."

"Oh, that was after we had landed," explained Mason airily. "We were a little slow in getting it out of the water, and an ice-floe came floating along and bumped into it. That's how that happened."

She shook her head at him and smiled a little.

"Your story doesn't quite agree with Mrs. Weston's version," she said. "According to her you had a very narrow escape indeed. And she also told me that even the best canoe-men up there considered it a miracle that you got through alive. So her husband told her before she left."

"Don't you believe it, Miss Warner!" protested Mason, his cheeks turning pink under his tan. He hated being lionized. "It's all gross exaggeration. We never were in any danger at all. Those two Indian lads I had with me were wizards with a canoe, and knew every trick. So, thanks to them, we were quite safe."

"Well, you may belittle the dangers and hazards of your journey as much as you like, Corporal," she said. "But I still think it was very brave and wonderful of you to take such heavy risks to bring me word as soon as possible about—about everything. The worry and anxiety about Dad's fate was getting almost more than I could bear. Certainty, even if it is ever so tragic, is always better than that horrible uncertainty, which is mixed with false, futile hopes which can only end in bitter disappointment. Now, I know what has happened to poor Dad, and at least I can give him a decent, Christian burial." She fell silent, and brooded for a moment.

Then she continued: "And you say that you think you know who did this horrible thing?"

"Yes. I feel pretty certain that we shall be able to lay our hands on him very soon. In fact, I expect he will be under arrest within a few days," he said confidently. He firmly believed what he said, and he had no idea how wildly inaccurate his statement would prove to be.

"I suppose it is sinful to feel vengeful; but I can't keep from wishing that the man who was brutal enough to strike down so ruthlessly a harmless old man like Dad gets all the punishment coming to him," she said a little bitterly. "A man like that is worse than a wild beast. I suppose you think it is wicked of me to feel like that."

"Not at all. I would think it highly unnatural if you felt any other way," answered Mason promptly. "But now you have heard my story, I think I'd better not bother you any more, and go back to the hotel." He rose to his feet as he spoke. He felt sure that she would like to be left alone with her thoughts.

"Oh, yes. Of course. You must go back at once and fetch Mrs. Weston," she exclaimed, rising hurriedly. "I'd forgotten all about her being left alone for so long in that nasty hotel. I promised to send you over for her as soon as you had told your story. You are both of you going to spend the rest of the evening here with me."

"Oh, but really, Miss Warner. Wouldn't you much rather prefer to be alone?" asked Mason diffidently.

"No. I want you both to come over. Mrs. Weston is going to sleep here during her stay. She'll be much more comfortable here than at the hotel. Sorry I can't put you up too, but I've only got one spare bed. But you must come over for breakfast to-morrow morning and spend your day here."

"Oh, but that is not at all necessary," protested Mason. "I can have my breakfast at the hotel. I should like to come over some time to-morrow, but I don't want you to go to the trouble of preparing meals for me."

"Well, I have to cook meals for Mrs. Weston and myself, so where is the difference?" she asked with a smile. She seemed quite to have recovered her composure.

"When I was up at Portage Bend that time, you all seemed to agree that the meals up at the hotel there were not fit for me to eat; and I can assure you that the meals at our local hotel are not in any way superior. I've sampled them to my sorrow."

"But it's different about you. A man can stand a considerably tougher diet than a girl," smiled Mason.

"Oh, I don't know about that. Anyhow, I want you to have your meals here."

"Well, that's extraordinarily kind of you. And since you insist, I shall certainly not protest further. Between you and me, I've never been over enthusiastic about the cooking at our small-town hotels. They generally serve dish-water for soup, muddy water for coffee, poorly boiled water for tea, and sole-leather for meat. Yes, thanks. I shall be glad to come. But I'd better run along and get Mrs. Weston."

"But before you go, Corporal," she said, stepping closely up to him, holding out her hand to him, her eyes gravely turned up to him, "I must again thank you from the bottom of my heart for all you've done for me. I can never thank you enough for everything."

"Oh, you've really nothing to thank me for," murmured Mason uncomfortably, blushing a little as he held her hand in his. "I was really only doing my duty."

"But you did your duty on my behalf, so you can't prevent me from being deeply grateful to you. You have rendered me a service which I feel I shall never be able to repay."

"Please don't mention anything about gratitude," stammered Mason. "I—I was only too glad to be able to be of some slight service to you. I'm only so terribly distressed that—that my quest should have such tragic ending."

"But that was certainly not your fault. You could not in any way have prevented the tragedy. But if it hadn't been for you, I should probably never have known what had happened to Dad, but I would have spent the rest of my days in this terrible doubt. But thanks to you I have been spared that. So there is every reason for me to be grateful."

"It's really quite undeserved. Your gratitude, I mean."

"I think I'm the better judge of that," said Mary Warner with a smile. "But now I think you'd better run along and get Mrs. Weston. She must have had more than enough of the hotel by now, poor thing."

On his way back to the hotel Mason was treading on air, and his heart was light within him, in spite of the pathetic scene he had just witnessed, and though he was genuinely sorry for Mary Warner.

But he knew now that all his worry and gloomy thoughts during the past few months had been sheer nonsense. So far from being scornful and antagonistic Mary Warner had been even friendlier and sweeter than he had dared hope for in his wildest dreams. And she had actually thanked him!

The streets which had appeared so dark and gloomy when he walked over to her house, now seemed bright and cheerful. He winked pleasantly up at the moon, which hung on the sky above him. All the hopes which he had thought were crushed for always began to blossom out again in his mind.

Mason again considered that all was right with the world.

CHAPTER XV

MRS. WESTON and Mason left Horton early on Monday morning. Before they left Mrs. Weston asked Mary Warner not to let anybody know for the present about the tragedy which had overtaken her father, and that his body had been found. This she did in accordance with instructions she had received from her husband before she left Portage Bend. The Inspector knew only too well that in a small community like Horton his wife's visit to Mary Warner accompanied by a Mountie would create a tremendous stir. Curiosity and speculations would be rampant, especially as everybody would know that Joe Warner was missing. And he also knew that immediately Mrs. Weston and Mason left Mary Warner would be deluged with inquiries as to the reason for their visit. And if the true facts of the story were made known to any person in the town, they would soon become public property, and would find their way into the newspapers. And that had to be avoided until the suspect was safely under lock and key.

All this Mrs. Weston explained to the girl, and the latter clearly saw the necessity for discretion. So she agreed to inform the curious that her visitors had come down to report that according to investigations carried out by the Police, it was feared that her father was lost, and that he in all probability had perished somewhere up in the North. That would satisfy their curiosity, and keep them from probing further.

Mason was in a cheerful, but rather introspective mood during the return train-journey. Several times when Mrs. Weston spoke to him, he had to ask: "Beg your pardon?"

But his thoughts were quite pleasant. He had again

begun to see the future in a rather rosy light. Mary Warner had been very sweet and friendly. "Pally," was the actual word he used. And she had seemed to like him. In fact, he decided, she must like him, because there was no reason on earth why she should pretend; if she didn't. That seemed to be very sound logic to him. And he decided that he would try hard to improve the friendship.

He would write to her often, and now, when he would probably be left in peace at the Detachment for some time, he would run down and see her as often as he got a chance. And perhaps in time she might come to entertain stronger feelings for him than mere friendship. And then some day he would ask her to marry him, and, thrilling thought this, perhaps she would say "Yes".

In fact, Mason spent most of his time on the way back to Portage Bend building splendid and ornate castles in the air. And if Mrs. Weston noticed his abstraction and preoccupation she did not allude to the fact, though she did seem to be secretly amused at something. But Mason was completely and blissfully unaware of that fact.

But a rather rude awakening awaited Mason at the depot at Portage Bend, where Inspector Weston turned up to meet his wife. Almost the first words Weston addressed to Mason were:

"Our bird has flown. And nobody seems to know where."

"You mean that chap Smiley, sir? "

"Of course. Now we have the deuce of a job on our hands. I want to see you in an hour's time in the office, Mason. I have a sort of a theory how to find him. I'll tell you all about things then."

Later, in the office, the Inspector explained the situation to Mason.

It appeared that the Winnipeg City Police had already been keenly interested in one J. A. Smiley and his present whereabouts, even before they got the communication from Portage Bend. This J. A. Smiley had been running a small broker and real estate business. He had dabbled considerably in mining stock, and had also speculated extensively. Some of his latest speculations had been very

unfortunate and disastrous, and more unfortunate still, he had used moneys entrusted to him by customers for his operations.

Towards the latter half of November some of these customers had approached the Police with the complaint that it had proved impossible to find Smiley in his office, that his office staff did not know where he was at present, and that nobody seemed to know what had happened to their money.

The Police immediately instituted investigations. The office staff, two male clerks and a girl typist, explained that about the middle of November their employer had informed them that he had to go to Toronto for a few weeks on business. And since then they had not seen him again. And all their efforts to get in touch with him had proved fruitless. They had wired to the connections the firm had in Toronto, but none of them had seen Smiley, nor had they received any communications from him. On being further questioned, the staff admitted that they knew that the firm was in financial difficulties, but the actual extent of these difficulties they did not know.

The Police now took the necessary steps to obtain authority to make a thorough examination of the firm's books. A firm of auditors were set to work on the books, and the examiners soon found that the business was hopelessly bankrupt, and that comparatively large sums of money, most of them money entrusted to Smiley by customers, had completely disappeared. There was no record anywhere to explain the disappearance of these sums.

The Winnipeg Police now organized a determined search for Smiley, but not the slightest trace had been found of the man so far. He was a bachelor, and had lived in a furnished flat on Broadway. At the apartment house the Police were informed that Smiley had removed all his personal effects and belongings, and had cancelled his lease in the middle of November. He had left no forwarding address, and nobody had any idea where he had gone after he left. Smiley seemed to have vanished completely off the face of the earth.

"That's all the information the Winnipeg Police could

supply," continued Weston. "And there is no doubt in my mind that their Smiley is identical with ours. It is very significant that he disappeared from Winnipeg at exactly the time when Warner and his companion started for the North. Anyhow, we have sent down to Winnipeg the blaze you cut out of the stake up on the claim, and I have asked the Police to have a handwriting expert compare the inscription with samples of their Smiley's handwriting. And if the two are found to be written by the same man, we are sure that the two Smileys are one and the same person. But even that knowledge won't be of much use to us in finding our Smiley. But I think I have an idea how to locate him. Even though I haven't any idea where he is at present, I have a strong suspicion where he can be found in a not very distant future."

"Up at the claim!" exclaimed Mason eagerly.

"Exactly, Corporal," agreed Weston with a smile. "I have a strong hunch that our gentleman will be on his way up to the claim as soon as the rivers and lakes are open."

"But wouldn't he think that rather risky, sir? To go up there so soon, I mean. Wouldn't he be inclined to wait, and see if anything happened?"

"Why should he? As far as he knows nobody knows of his connection with Warner. And he certainly does not know that Warner's body has been found, and that we are holding a neat bundle of evidence against him as Warner's murderer. Remember, the man is a gambler, and a ruined gambler at that, so he'll want money. And the only way he can raise money is by selling his claim to some interested party. But no interested party is going to buy a mining claim on the strength of being shown a few bits of gold-bearing quartz, an assayer's report, and a registration certificate. They will want to see for themselves, and the owner of the claim will have to show them or their representatives what he's really got. And as I should imagine that Smiley needs money rather urgently, he will act quickly. So I rather imagine he will be on his way up soon. It is never hard to find people who will take an interest in a gold-claim, especially when it is as good as this seems to be. And there is also another consideration. Smiley will certainly get up there as soon as possible to

bury the remains of Warner. He will be in a constant dread that someone might stumble on the body by accident till he's got it safely buried. Even if he were a fool, which I doubt, he would know that such a find would be very awkward for him so near his claim. So, taking everything into consideration, I feel very confident that it won't be so very long before he starts out for the claim."

"By Jove, sir! I'm sure you are right. How would it be if I went up there to receive him?" asked Mason eagerly.

"Just what I had in mind," remarked Weston with a grin. "I thought you would rather take to the idea. I have been in touch with Superintendent Trench, and he quite approves of the scheme. So as soon as the rivers and lakes are navigable, in about a week's time, I should imagine, you'll start for the claim, and wait for him. Of course, if he gets up there ahead of you, so much the better. But I rather doubt that. So be ready to start at the first opportunity."

"Yes, sir. But I think I shall be able to start earlier than in a week's time. The boys told me that the barrier up where we crashed has collapsed, and that the ice has been going out fast the last few days. So the river should be quite open in a few days."

"Well, we'll see about that. I'll tell you when I think it's safe to start. In the meantime, here are a few matters I want you to attend to while you are around. . . ."

After supper that evening Mason and his crony, Constable Ross, went over to the local pool-room for a game of billiards. As usual, there was quite a crowd in the large room, though few actually played billiards. The pool-room was really the news-exchange of the town, and was extensively patronized.

Mason and Ross found an unoccupied table, and went over to the rack to select cues. As Mason was scientifically chalking the tip of his cue, a booming voice sounded at his right elbow:

"Hello, Corporal. How's the boy?"

Mason turned, and found himself face to face with MacDonald, one of the free-traders he had camped with up

near Beaver Narrows during his search for Joe Warner.

"Oh, hello, Mac!" greeted Mason, shaking hands. "How are you? And how did you and Bancroft get on, robbing the poor, misguided natives of their hard-gotten pelts?"

"Oh, so-so. We made them come acrost, all right," admitted MacDonald with a grin. "Guess our charmin' personalities, as you might say, turned the trick. How did you get on after you left us that time?"

"First rate. Had a fine trip down."

"I heard you'd made another trip up later."

"Yes. The ordinary patrol before break-up, you know."

"What about ole Joe Warner? Is he still missin'?"

"I'm not sure. Heard a rumour that he had gone towards Slave Lake, or some place in that direction. I suppose he's prospecting over there some place."

Ross listened to his chum with respect. As a cold-blooded, facile fabricator Mason certainly was at the top of the class, he decided. Especially did he admire the artistic, fictitious details he added, to make his bare-faced lies sound more plausible. But he kept a perfectly straight face.

"Well, I know ole Joe wouldn't go an' get hisself lost. I tole you so at first, didn't I?" asked MacDonald.

But Mason was not listening to him. An idea had just come to him, and he was rapidly turning it over in his mind. MacDonald, he reflected, had actually seen Smiley on the trail, so he would probably be able to recognize him. Those old-timers had long memories for faces.

"Say, Mac," he said. "You remember the fellow you and Bancroft met, who was driving Joe Sayese's dogs?"

"Sure. What about him?"

"Do you think you would be able to recognize him if you saw him again?"

"Sure thing. I'd reckernize both his face an' figger easy."

"But what if he should be clean-shaven. You know, you tole me he had whiskers when you met him."

"Well, even so, I should reckernize him. I remember his eyes well, and the face above the whiskers. Sure I'd know him agin if I met him. Why?"

"Well, I may want you to point him out to me some day. Doing anything just now, Mac?"

"Nope. I had a good season last winter, an' reckon I'll take it easy for a spell. Why?"

"How would you like a job as special constable for a spell, and go along with me on a patrol up in the north country? I'm leaving in a few days."

"For how long?"

"Perhaps a couple of months. Perhaps for most of the summer. I can't say exactly."

"Well, I don't know about that," said MacDonald reflectively. "Guess I've had enough o' the North to last me till next winter. Why would you want me along?"

"Can't tell you just now. But I want you particularly. And you would do me a great favour if you would come along with me. I really want you badly."

MacDonald looked at him shrewdly for a few moments. At last he said:

"Say, has this got anything to do with that fellow you just asked me about? The one Bancroft an' I met near P.A.?"

Mason hesitated for a moment, then he finally said:

"Well, yes. But keep quiet about it, Mac."

"What's he done?"

Mason bent his head close to MacDonald's ear with an air of mystery:

"Claim-jumping," he said in a low, confidential voice, and Ross, who heard, advanced his pal further up in the class of fabricators.

"So that is it. Well, I've no use for them critters. So seein' you seem so set on havin' me along, I'll go with you. Guess it'll do me good, an' help me save some money," he remarked with a smile.

"Good. Now keep this under your hat till we start. I don't want that fellow to learn that we'll be on his trail. Here, Mac. Take my cue and give Ross here a game. I'll be back presently."

He pushed his cue into MacDonald's hand, turned abruptly and walked out of the pool-room. Both Ross and MacDonald stared curiously after him.

"Now what the hell bit him all at once?" MacDonald wanted to know.

Ross shrugged his shoulders.

"Search me," he said. "I suppose he had a brainwave or something. He gets them occasionally. Come on, let's get this game started."

About half an hour later Mason was back.

"I've been over to see the Inspector," he explained to MacDonald. "And it's all fixed up for you to go along with me as special constable. Come over to the Barracks to-morrow morning, so we can fix the whole thing up officially."

"Sure. I'll be there. Hope you ain't aimin' to lead me into a heap o' trouble?" he asked suspiciously.

"No. I don't think there will be any trouble."

"Well, I ain't so sure about that," observed MacDonald with a twinkle in his eyes. "You guys certainly seem to have a knack for findin' trouble when you do set out. But I guess it won't do me any harm to get a little excitement, as you might say. But funny me bein' a sort o' policeman. Gosh, darn it! I never thought my ole man's son would sink quite as low as that. Haw-haw! It's sure funny." He laughed loudly.

"Never mind about that. Only keep it strictly to yourself, that you've sunk so low. And now, you two continue your game. I'll watch and see that there is no monkey-business."

One early morning five days later the two set out in a canoe for the North. The river was now almost free of ice. Only an occasional floe came floating down. It was a lovely, bright morning, and the broad Saskatchewan glittered in the sun.

At their first night-camp out of Portage Bend Mason took MacDonald fully into his confidence. After supper that night he told him the whole story about Warner, and their reasons for keeping it a deep secret.

"Gosh, darn it! Knifin' to death a fine ole scout like Joe Warner!" exclaimed MacDonald, when Mason had finished. "I sure never heard o' nothin' in my life before that riled me more'n this. I only hope we catch that

murderin' skunk. I feel that het up I've half a notion to shoot him on sight! "

" Nothing of that sort, old-timer. You are an officer of the law now, and we have to let the law take its course. Besides, shooting is far too good for the swine."

" You're dam' tootin' it is, now I come to think o' it. Hangin' is just what he deserves." MacDonald brooded in silence for a while.

" Say, Corporal," he said suddenly. " Won't that murderin' skunk hear all about it when Grayson an' Angus bring ole Joe's body in to the Ben'? I mean, there has to be an inquest, an' I reckon it will get into all the papers when it comes out that Joe has been murdered. An' the murderer would be sure to read all about it, an' high-tail for furrin' parts."

" Well, he may have left for the North by the time the body gets down to the Bend. But even if he hasn't, he won't find anything in the papers that'll scare him, even if he finds anything at all, which I doubt. You see, we're not going to present any of our evidence at the inquest. The Police, I mean. And the coroner will get a hint about not probing too deeply into the matter, as it might ruin our chances for catching the murderer. So he's sure to instruct the jury to return an open verdict, and that won't make any story worth publishing for the news-hounds."

" What's an open verdict? " asked MacDonald.

" Well, in this case it would mean that the jury will find that they are unable to decide how Joe died, whether it was by accident, or by suicide, or by murder. And after an open verdict you can always reopen the case at any time, when fresh evidence is produced as to the way he died."

" I get you. No. There won't be much excitement for any newspaper in that. So I guess they won't print nothin' about it. An' anyhow, if this murderin' houn' should hear or read about the inquest, he would sure think that nobody was suspicioning him for havin' had a han' in it."

" Exactly. That's just the impression we want to give him."

" Say, won't that guy get a whale o' a jolt when he gets up to his claim an' fin's us waitin' for him with open arms? I'll tell the world, he'll sure get the surprise o' his sinful

life. Yessir! " remarked MacDonald with a broad grin.

" Yes. I'm afraid it will come as a bit of a shock to him," agreed Mason, grinning back at MacDonald.

Mason felt in excellent spirits. He had written a letter to Mary Warner while he was waiting to start, in which he explained to her about his impending journey into the North, and the reasons for it. And the day before he left Portage Bend he had got an answer from her which had been extremely friendly. In fact, she had written like one old pal to another, as Mason expressed it to himself. She had told him in her letter to be very careful, and not take unnecessary risks, that she hoped he would return safe and sound, and that she hoped he would come down and see her as soon as he came back. Now would a girl write like that to a chap if she didn't care for him a little? was the important question Mason put squarely to himself. Well, hardly, was his complacent answer. At least, he shouldn't think so, he qualified cautiously, after having given the matter further earnest consideration. So no wonder he felt in high spirits.

He and MacDonald pushed swiftly and steadily northward. About forty miles north of Glengarry Lake they met Grayson and Angus coming down. The two had hired a York-boat from the Hudson's Bay Company, as it would be easier to transport the body in the large scow than in a canoe.

Grayson and Angus told Mason that they had travelled south as far as to the Hudson's Bay Company's post at Swan Lake, twenty miles south of Moose Lake, after he had left them. At Swan Lake they had stopped to wait for the break-up. During their period of waiting they had a coffin made for the body of Warner, and this was now standing in the middle of their scow, well covered up with tarpaulins, so that nobody could see what it was. They had no intention of letting anyone know what their freight was, and they had given strict orders to their crew of five Indians not to let the information leak out that they had a body on board.

They had told nobody up at Swan Lake who the dead man was, not even the manager of the Hudson's Bay post. They had merely told that it was the body of some white

trapper, which some Indians up near Moose Lake had found in the woods, and that the trapper had apparently frozen to death. They had placed the body in the coffin trussed in the tarpaulin, so that nobody had seen it who might have recognized Joe Warner.

Mason nodded his approval. Then he in his turn related briefly what had happened on his own journey down, and all the new developments in the case.

Mason also got a further piece of information from Grayson and Angus, which rather pleased him. On their way down they had met no white men travelling up, so Smiley must be well behind them, if he had already started.

The two parties soon took leave of each other, and they continued on their various ways.

Mason and MacDonald stopped at the Stony River Reserve to have a talk with Chief Black Bear. It had occurred to Mason that although Smiley would certainly have obtained the directions for getting to the claim by the river-trail from Warner before he killed him, he would almost certainly try to pick up a guide at the Reserve. And he did not want any hint to be conveyed to Smiley about their activities up in that part of the country last winter, or about his presence up there now. Any hint like that might scare Smiley away, and Mason particularly wanted to arrest him up at the claim. If he was arrested some other place, he would certainly deny all knowledge of the claim or its location, and it might be difficult to prove that he actually had any connection with it. Of course, there was the chance that the handwriting experts might be able to prove that the inscriptions on the stakes were actually written by Smiley, but Mason was a little doubtful about the absolute efficacy of evidence based on handwriting. But if Smiley was apprehended on the claim, then he would have a hard time to explain how he came to locate it, and also to explain several other very pertinent matters. So Mason decided to warn the chief that he must order the members of his band to keep strict silence about all that had occurred.

When Mason had explained the whole situation to the chief, the latter smiled.

"Don't worry, Jimmy," he said. "I've already told my people to keep a silent tongue in their heads about this whole business. So nobody will tell him a thing, even if he tries to pump them. But I'm going to be right on the spot, and see that he doesn't get any chance."

"Thanks, Johnny. But if he picks up a guide here, he might let slip something on the trip up about policemen having been up here recently. And you know a fellow with a bad conscience is bound to be very suspicious."

"If he picks up a guide here, that guide won't tell him a thing. Not one little thing," assured the chief with a grin. "Because I'm going to be that guide."

"Good for you, Johnny!" exclaimed Mason, smiling broadly. "I hoped you were going to say that. But I didn't like to ask you, seeing you have helped us such a lot already."

"Gosh, Jimmy. You ought to know I would do anything to help a friend," said the chief a little reproachfully. "More so now, when I've very little or nothing to do."

"Well, thanks awfully, Johnny. You've rid me of one of my worries. Then we shall probably see you up there some time, when it comes to the big show-down. I only hope Mac and I won't have to wait too long."

"I think he'll be along very soon to bury the evidence of his crime, if I'm any judge of human nature," observed the chief. "Well, seeing you fellows won't stay, I'll say good-bye, and good luck."

"Good-bye, Johnny. And many thanks."

Mason and MacDonald had a hard, gruelling journey ahead of them. The river above the Reserve was an almost continuous string of boiling rapids and cascades. They had to negotiate as many as four or five portages every day, most of them long and tedious. And as their canoe contained provisions for almost two months, each portaging involved heavy, tiring hauling. They were quite weary and tired when they at last reached the claim on the third day.

They established their camp in a ravine amongst the hills well back from the small lake that stretched almost right up to the southern boundary of the claim. The camp was so well concealed that even the smoke from their

camp-fire would be invisible to anyone coming up the lake from the south. The claim itself was a couple of miles to the east of their camp.

On the highest point of a ridge close to the camp, from where there was an uninterrupted view over the whole surface of the lake, they established a look-out post. One of them was always on duty there from dawn to dark, watching the southern end of the lake through field-glasses for approaching canoes.

A fortnight went past of this boring, tedious watching and waiting. Mason was beginning to feel very fidgety. The suspicion that Smiley somehow had got warning that his crime had been discovered, and that he had disappeared for good, began to impress itself on the corporal. And it filled him with moody pessimism. Perhaps the whole truth of the matter had found its way into the newspapers in spite of all their caution, and perhaps Smiley had read them and had been scared out of any plan he might have had about going up to the claim. And if that was the case, he would have to sit up here for months in this dark, dismal, lonesome spruce-forest and kick his heels. And in the meantime Mary Warner might forget all about his existence. He couldn't expect a girl to retain an interest in a fellow she never sees or hears from. That would be too much to expect. "Oh, what a dam'd mess!" was his invariable exclamation when he got to this part of his speculations.

One day around noon, towards the middle of their third week of waiting, while Mason was moodily cooking dinner, MacDonald, who had been on guard up at the look-out, burst hurriedly out of the spruce-forest which surrounded their camp on all sides. He was panting. Evidently he had been running, and excitement was written all over him.

"They are comin'!" he hissed breathlessly, wildly waving the field-glasses he was carrying in his hand in the direction of the invisible lake.

Mason sat up straight with a snap.

"Are you sure?" he asked, his eyes gleaming.

"Well, two canoes are sure comin' up the lake, an' I can't see what anybody else would be doin' up in this part

o' the world except them," answered MacDonald logically, still snapping after air.

"How many people in them? "

"Couldn't see for right. But I think there was about three in each canoe. I didn't wait to get a clost look. Thought I'd better sky-rocket back to tell you."

"Here! Give me the field-glasses!" cried Mason tersely, jumping to his feet. "I'm going up there to have a look at the outfit. You finish cooking the dinner. It's almost done, anyhow."

"Hadn't we better put out the fire?" asked MacDonald.

"No. There's no smoke from these few dry sticks. And the breeze, what there is of it, blows from the south. Even the keenest Indian nose can't smell the smoke down on the lake. You just go right ahead with the cooking from where I left off. I'll be back in a few minutes."

The "few minutes" stretched themselves into more than thirty, and consequently MacDonald soon saw himself faced by a most vexing and annoying problem. How was he to keep the pork and beans hot without burning them?

He stirred the contents of the frying-pan diligently with a stick, sniffed suspiciously, scowled at the spot where Mason had disappeared, and removed the pan from the fire. Then he again scowled at the extremely indifferent woods, muttered unprintable things to himself, and put the pan back again. This procedure he continued again and again, his scowl deepening, and his mutterings getting more and more vitriolic and fluent all the time.

When the tardy one at last turned up he should, of course, as a good cook, have given vent to a few pointed, pertinent, profane, and terse remarks, but in his eagerness to hear about the approaching canoes he quite overlooked this time-honoured convention.

"Do you think it's them?" he called instead.

Mason nodded his head, a pleased expression on his face.

"Yes. I'm sure of it," he said with grim satisfaction.

"In one canoe was one white man, a half-breed, and Johnny Black Bear. In the second one two white men and a breed. I didn't know the two breeds. Probably some fellows from down Prince Albert way. Johnny wouldn't

have been with them if they hadn't been our party. I suppose the other two men have come along to look over the claim. The canoes were heading straight for the claim, and were close to shore when I came away."

"Gee! I'm glad our watch is over at last!" exclaimed MacDonald with deep satisfaction. "It was gettin' kinder monotonous sittin' up here like two bumps on a log. Say, hadn't we better go down an' tackle them straight away? I guess I ain't hungry no more anyhow."

"Oh, let's eat first. I'm hungry, and the food is hot. And they'll be busy unloading their canoes and fixing camp, so there's no hurry."

But in spite of his apparent nonchalant indifference Mason bolted his food as quickly as if he were sitting in a railway-station refreshment-room with one ear cocked for the guard's whistle. In reality he was just as eager as MacDonald to go down and face the party, but on principle he believed in maintaining an attitude of quiet, decorous dignity even in moments like this. And besides, he really had been very hungry.

When the meal was over he insisted on lighting his pipe and cleaning their dishes and utensils and putting them away, much to the fuming MacDonald's annoyance.

"Say, you're the most cold-blooded fish I ever met," he complained. "Here you're goin' down to tackle a desprit murderer, an' all you can think o' is eatin', smokin', and cleanin' dishes an' such truck. If it'd been me, I would 'a' had the bracelets on him by now. You bet!"

"Never hurry when there is no need for hurry, old boy," retorted Mason with a grin. "But seeing you're so eager to get action, we'd better get started. Now when we get there, you watch the white men closely, and see if you recognize any of them. And then tell me on the quiet if one of them is the fellow you and Bancroft met on the trail. But be sure not to make any mistake."

"No, you can bet on that. If I reckonize him, I reckonize him. An' if I don't, I just don't. I ain't goin' to make no mistake."

Over near the claim there was in the meantime bustling

activity. The two canoes were drawn up on the beach near No. 1 stake of "The Three Lone Spruces" claim. A half-breed had started a fire, and had begun making preparations for a meal. The three white men and the other breed were unloading the canoes, and piling the contents near the fire. Chief Black Bear was sitting on a stone watching their efforts. As his capacity was purely that of guide, he did not consider it incumbent on himself to render assistance where it was not necessary. Besides, he did not like his present company very much. The three white men had been too prone to accentuate the vast superiority of the white race over the red, and though the chief rather put this down as ignorance and lack of experience, this tactlessness had rather annoyed him on the trip up. Of course, he admitted frankly to himself, he was a little to blame himself for their attitude. He had posed during the journey as a not particularly bright Indian, who only knew a few words of broken English, but even so their attitude of lofty superiority had been unpardonable. They had invariably addressed him as "Redskin" in the most patronizing and contemptuous tone, and that was enough to get any man's back up. And they had passed reflections on Indians in general, and himself in particular, which could not be overlooked or forgiven. That was the real reason for his inactivity.

Of the white men one was tall and wiry; another was a little shorter and more stocky, but appeared hard and strong; and the third was also short and stocky, but he seemed inclined to pudginess and softness. None of them appeared particularly genial, but the third man seemed to suffer from perennial surliness and ill-humour, and had proved to be a particularly noisome companion. They were all bearded, and evidently had not bothered about shaving on the trip.

Chief Black Bear knew that at any moment now a rather dramatic surprise would be sprung on the party, but not even the sharpest observer would have been able to discover the faintest sign of anticipation or excitement in his manner. He appeared utterly at ease, and wholly unconcerned.

The men had finished unloading the canoes, and were

sitting smoking near the fire, when Mason and MacDonald stepped out from the forest and walked unhurriedly up to them.

"How-do-you-do," greeted Mason pleasantly.

The group by the fire had been staring at these unexpected visitors in silent amaze, but now the tallest of the white men spoke.

"Hullo. Where do you fellows spring from?" he asked.

"We are camped a couple of miles west of here. We happened to see your canoes come up the lake, and thought we would come over and see who you were," explained Mason.

The tall man looked with interest at Mason's uniform.

"Say, you're some kind of a cop, aren't you?" he asked.

Mason smiled.

"Well, I suppose they would call me so down in the States. I'm Corporal Mason of the Royal North-West Mounted Police. Where do you gentlemen come from, and what are you doing up here?"

"Well, I suppose you've a right to ask, seeing you are a cop. We come from Minneapolis. We are up here to look over a mining-claim owned by Weaver over there," he said, indicating the pudgy of the two shorter men. "Morgan there," indicating the other stocky man, "and I are mining engineers. We have been sent up here to examine this claim for a concern down in Minneapolis that's interested in it. My name is Ward, by the way."

"Glad to meet you," murmured Mason conventionally. He was feeling not a little perturbed. None of the men answered to the name of Smith!

He turned to the man called Weaver and asked:

"How is it that you own this claim? It has been staked and registered by a man called Smith, it seems."

"I bought it from him," came the prompt answer. "I've got the bill of sale right here in my pocket."

A sickening and ghastly feeling of complete failure had rushed over Mason. This was a contingency he had completely overlooked. Here he had been wasting precious time coming all the way up here, and waiting patiently for almost three weeks, while all the time the murderer was

making good his escape. For a moment the crushing, bitter disappointment almost numbed all his faculties.

"May I see the bill of sale, please?" he asked half mechanically, his heart heavy within him. "It is one of our duties to see that no claim-jumping takes place," he added.

"Oh, certainly. I'll show it to you right now," said Weaver readily. He put his hand in an inside pocket and produced a folded paper, which he handed to the corporal. Mason opened it and examined the contents. It proved to be a genuine bill of sale in which John Smith transferred all his rights in the "Three Lone Spruces" mineral claim to C. Weaver for the sum of one thousand dollars. Everything seemed to be quite proper and in full order, and Mason's discouragement almost amounted to despair.

"Did you know this John Smith well?" he asked, looking up from the paper.

"No. I can't say I did. I met him down in Regina last January, and he offered to sell his claim to me. And as the samples of ore he produced, and the assayer's report, looked very satisfactory, I bought it."

While Weaver was talking Mason watched him closely, and now he discovered a thing about him which had escaped his notice before. The man was obviously and palpably nervous. His fingers twitched spasmodically, and his eyes seemed to be watchful and shiftily alert. And Mason began to suspect that there was more behind this transaction than appeared on the surface.

"Do you mean to tell me that you gave a man who was practically a stranger one thousand dollars for a mining-claim which might be a fake?" he asked suspiciously.

"Well, he produced the registration certificate, so it didn't look like a fake. And although it was of course a gamble, I felt like taking a chance on it. But what has all this got to do with you, anyhow?" asked Weaver in a rather weak attempt at bluster.

"I have to make quite sure that nothing illegal has taken place," answered Mason shortly. The man's attempt at bluster had further strengthened him in his belief that there was something fishy about the whole transaction. "What did this man Smith look like?"

"He was a rather tall and slim fellow," answered Weaver. "Fair, I should say. He looked a very ordinary sort of fellow to me."

Mason felt a thrill surge up in him. Weaver was obviously lying. The description of Warner's companion he had, and which he knew was correct, was exactly the opposite of the one given by Weaver. So why was the man lying? He must have a very good reason for it. Mason began to feel more and more convinced that Weaver must know something about the whole affair. . . .

He was interrupted in his cogitation by feeling his elbow being softly nudged, and he heard MacDonald whisper softly in his ear:

"Don't believe anything he says. He's the guy."

Mason managed to hide his elation. He did not even turn, but just nodded his head ever so slightly to show that he had understood. For a few moments he looked thoughtfully and searchingly at Weaver, whose nervousness obviously increased under that steady stare.

Then suddenly Mason shot this question at the man:

"Do you know J. A. Smiley from Winnipeg?"

For a moment the eyelids of the man flickered, and an expression of fear seemed to shoot into his face. But he recovered his self-control so quickly that Mason was not quite sure that he had actually seen this reaction.

"No. I never heard the name before," he said steadily.

Weaver's companions had kept quiet so far, but now the taller man, Ward, again spoke up:

"Say. What's all this questioning about, anyhow?"

"Please keep quiet for a moment," said Mason with a quiet air of authority. Then he again turned to Weaver and hurled another question at him:

"What about Joe Warner?"

This time the man had a greater struggle to control his countenance. Mason distinctly saw his eyes widen in fear for a moment, and some muscles in his face quivered. But by a terrific effort he managed to regain his self-control, except that his fingers twitched worse than ever, and his hands shook.

"Joe Warner?" he repeated. "Never heard of the man."

"Have you ever been up in this country before, Mr. Weaver?" was Mason's next question.

"Never in my life," came the prompt answer. Weaver seemed relieved. "I've never been north of Saskatoon."

"I see," said Mason quietly. He turned and waved MacDonald forward. "Have you ever seen this man before, MacDonald? And if so, where and when?" he asked, his eyes back on Weaver.

"Sure, I've seen him before," drawled MacDonald. "Me and my partner, Bancroft, met this guy on the trail two days' travel out from Prince Albert about the middle of December. He was driving towards town. He had a team of five dogs that used to belong to Joe Sayese in Portage Bend."

The man calling himself Weaver had been sitting on a bedding-roll during Mason's questioning, but now he jumped to his feet and shook his fist at MacDonald, his face working grotesquely with fury and fear.

"You are a dam'd liar!" he shouted passionately. "I was nowhere near Prince Albert during the whole of last December. I was down in Saskatoon and Regina."

"Quiet!" snapped Mason. "You can swear that is the same man, MacDonald?"

"I sure can. I remember his figger an' face well. He had whiskers then as he has now."

"He's mistaken," raved Weaver frantically. "I swear he's mistaken or lying!"

"I don't think so, Weaver," said Mason evenly. "I feel convinced that MacDonald met you. And at the time you were driving a team of dogs that belonged to Joe Warner, a man who disappeared about the middle of December. How can you explain that?"

"I have nothing to explain! I have never driven dogs in my life. And I've never been even near this country before!" shouted Weaver, now quite beside himself with rage and fear. "I don't know anything about Smiley or Warner. You are trying to frame me. You'll be accusing me of killing Warner next!"

"How did you know Warner was killed?" asked Mason quietly. "Nobody here has told you."

Weaver stood quite still. He appeared petrified. His eyes were wide and staring, while the blood slowly ebbed from his face and left it grey as putty. Too late he realized the enormity of the slip he had made in his agitation. He felt dazed and stunned. And he cursed himself bitterly for allowing his tongue to run away for one unguarded, irretrievable moment. . . .

As from a long distance away he heard Mason speaking to him:

"The game is up, Smiley," he heard him say in a hard, grim voice. "I arrest you for the murder of Joe Warner. And I have to warn you that anything . . ."

Mason had got that far in his formula when Weaver, or Smiley, to give him his right name, suddenly galvanized into action.

He snarled something, his features contorted like those of a trapped animal, and his right hand leaped to the side-pocket of his coat.

Mason, who saw the movement and knew its portent, rushed towards him. But he was not quite quick enough. Smiley's hand reappeared holding a gun, and just as Mason flung himself on the desperate man a shot rang out. The impetuosity of Mason's rush flung the two men off balance, and they both crashed to the ground, Mason on top of Smiley. The latter's small automatic exploded twice more before Mason was able to wrench it out of his hand, and fling it away. Smiley seemed to have been half-stunned in the fall, so it did not take more than a few seconds for Mason to get his handcuffs out of his pocket and click them on his captive's wrists.

He rose to his feet, and found MacDonald and Chief Black Bear standing each on one side of him, and behind them the rest of the party was standing, eyes agog.

"Johnny an' I was right on the spot after you, to give you a han'," announced MacDonald. "But you managed alone." He sounded a little disappointed that his services had not been required.

"I think Mac hoped there was going to be a rough-house," remarked the chief with a grin. "He always was a rowdy . . ." He suddenly broke off and stared at Mason's left hand. "Did you get hurt, Jimmy?" he

asked with sudden concern. "There's blood running down your left hand."

Mason looked down at his hand and saw a thin red stream running down the back of it.

"Yes. I felt he nicked me in the arm with his pea-shooter," he explained with a grin. "But I was so busy at the time I didn't pay much attention to it. But it can't be much." He flexed his arm tentatively. "No bones broken," he announced. "It's only a scratch."

"Here, Mac. Get his tunic off, and let's have a look at it," ordered the chief.

MacDonald promptly assumed the job of valet, and as soon as the tunic had been removed, the chief carefully turned up the shirt-sleeve, which was stained red. The other men crowded around, while Smiley lay where he had dropped, his eyes closed. He seemed to have passed out completely, except that he was groaning a little now and then.

The chief soon laid bare a gash on Mason's forearm, where the bullet had ploughed its way.

"Only a scratch, as you said," he announced. "You were lucky. But we'd better get it bandaged up. Any of you fellows got any bandages?"

"Sure," cried the man called Morgan. "We've got a regular first-aid outfit. Bandages, cotton-wool, and boracic powder. I'll go and get them."

A few minutes later the arm was bandaged, and Mason informed them that it seemed all right, except for a little stiffness.

"It looks as if you'll have to do all the paddling back, Mac," he said. "I'm afraid I shan't be much use."

"Nothin' doin'!" protested MacDonald in mock alarm. "I'm goin' to get me a good fellow down on the Reserve to help me handle the canoe. An' Johnny here will help me that fur. Won't you, Johnny?"

"Of course. Don't you worry. You won't die from overwork this trip. Look, Mason. Your prisoner seems to be coming to."

Smiley had opened his eyes and was staring wildly up at the group before him. His hands moved, and he became aware that they seemed to be held together by some-

thing unresisting, which pressed coldly around his wrists. He lifted his head to see, and when he discovered the handcuffs, he groaned again, and his face became a picture of the most agonized and abject terror.

Mason stepped up to him.

"Feeling better, Smiley?" he asked in a friendly voice. "Sorry I had to rough-house you just now, but you asked for it, you know."

"Take off these handcuffs," said Smiley thickly. "You've no right to shackle me. I've told you I'm not Smiley. And you've not the slightest justification for arresting me."

"I've every justification in the world," answered Mason gravely. "And you're going down to Portage Bend as my prisoner. Make no mistakes about that! And I must warn you that anything you say may be used as evidence against you."

"I'm not going to say a thing. I've nothing to say, anyhow. You've made a terrible mistake. You've not the slightest shred of evidence against me. You haven't got one thing on me, and you'll get into trouble over this," cried Smiley defiantly.

Mason merely shrugged his shoulders.

"That's a matter for the courts to decide," he said indifferently. "But you'd better get up, so you can get back to a more comfortable seat by the fire. Here, Mac. Give him a hand up. And I had better take care of this," he continued, bending down and picking up Smiley's automatic pistol, which still lay on the ground. "Better see if he has got any more weapons concealed on him, Mac. We don't want any more accidents."

MacDonald helped Smiley to his feet, and then he carefully and thoroughly searched his clothing. He finally produced a heavy sheath-knife, which Smiley had carried at a belt under his coat. He handed the knife to Mason.

"This is all the weapons the prisoner has, Corporal," he reported formally. He felt rather self-conscious and a little important at being actually engaged in "police-work."

"All right. Well, Smiley, find yourself a comfortable seat. And you fellows had better get your cooking going

again. I'm afraid I've rather delayed your dinner. And say, Mac. You'd better start right over to our camp, and get our gear all packed. Bring it all down here in the canoe. We'll start down this afternoon after Smiley has had his meal."

Mason was about to sit down near his prisoner, when Ward and Morgan asked if they could have a word with him. He whispered to Chief Black Bear to keep an eye on Smiley, and then walked over to the two men who had withdrawn out of hearing of the rest of the party.

"Say, Corporal," said Ward. "Would you mind telling us what this is all about?"

"Yes. That's what we want to know," supplemented Morgan.

"This chap Smiley and a prospector called Joe Warner came up here together to stake this claim," explained Mason briefly. "Warner had heard there was gold here, and Smiley grub-staked him. Evidently Smiley wanted the whole claim for himself, and so he killed Warner. We found his body up here towards the end of last winter. He had been knifed to death. As we rather expected that Smiley would come back here, I came up to wait for him."

"But that fellow must have been a perfect fool to murder another man, and then go straight back to run into the arms of the Police," remarked Morgan.

"Oh, no. He had covered his tracks well. In fact he had been quite clever. But he slipped up on a few minor matters, and that eventually got us on his trail."

"Can't you tell us about it?" asked Ward eagerly.

"I'm sorry, but I can't. The story is too long, and besides it is all evidence, which I'm not at liberty to disclose now."

"Oh, well. I suppose we shall hear about it some time," said Ward resignedly.

He and Morgan looked over at Smiley, who was sitting dejectedly, chin on chest, on the same bedding-roll he had occupied when Mason and MacDonald first appeared.

"Gosh! Just think that we have had that murdering hound as a side-kick for all this time," observed Ward.

"I always thought there was something funny and jumpy

about him. I never liked him, so I can't say I'm sorry for him."

"You certainly get thrown together with some queer bed-fellows in this gold-mining game," remarked Morgan philosophically.

"But say, Corporal," said Ward, turning back to him. "I hope we won't get mixed up in this affair in any way as witnesses, or anything like that?"

"No. Not at all. I'll just take down your explanations of your connection with Smiley in my report-book. You and Morgan can sign it, and MacDonald and Chief Black Bear can testify as witnesses to your signatures. That's all that's needed."

"Thanks. But who's Chief Black Bear?" asked Morgan.

"The Indian guide you picked up at Stony River Reserve, who brought you up here," explained Mason with a smile.

"Say, I wanted to ask you about that fellow," broke in Ward. "When we hired him he said his name was Johnny, and on the trip up he pretended he could only speak a few words of broken English. And then I heard him speak to you, and he spoke English as well as any of us."

"He ought to," grinned Mason. "He's an honours graduate from St. John's College in Winnipeg, and a very intelligent and well-read chap. He's the chief of the Band at Stony River Reserve."

"But why did he pretend he was only an ordinary Indian, and a not particularly bright Indian at that?" asked Ward with a puzzled frown.

"He probably wanted to pull your legs," suggested Mason with a laugh. "Johnny likes to have his jokes occasionally."

"Joke is right!" admitted Morgan emphatically and a little ruefully. "And the joke is certainly on us. Damn it! I was talking to that fellow as if he had the mind of a baby. And I explained things to him as I would to a kid of five. He certainly must have had a few quiet laughs to himself at our expense."

"He probably did," admitted Mason with a wide grin.

"You never know what sort of bed-fellows you may be thrown in with in this country," he added with twinkling eyes.

"Dam' right you don't!" agreed Ward. "After this, when I fall in with a stranger up here I'm going to 'Your Majesty' him, and 'sir' him, and 'Your Highness' him, just in case he should happen to be the King of England or the Governor-General of Canada, or the last descendant of King Montezuma. Yessir. I never thought I was going to have my leg pulled by an Indian. However, let that pass. I'm darn glad we won't be mixed up further in this Weaver, I mean Smiley affair, because now we're here, we want to look over this prospect. We have powers of attorney from the concern that sent us up here to stake a few claims around here, if we think the prospect looks good. And it will be all right for us to carry on, won't it?"

"Certainly."

"Fine! And I suppose Smiley is still owner of this claim in spite of everything? So if our people decide to buy, they have to deal with him?"

"Yes, I expect so," answered Mason reflectively. "Except the courts should decide that the next-of-kin of the man he killed is entitled to half of the claim. We know they went up here to stake the claim on a fifty-fifty basis."

"Oh, well. In that case I suppose we won't have much trouble to get the next-of-kin to sell out. Do you know anything about them?"

"Yes. Warner left only a daughter, she's his only heir."

"I see," said Ward, pulling out a note-book. "Would you mind giving me her name and address in case we have to get in touch with her?"

Mason gave him the desired information, which he wrote down carefully.

"Thanks very much for all your help, Corporal," said Ward as he returned his pocket-book to his pocket. "You've dealt very squarely and fairly with us."

"Oh, that's quite all right. Sorry I have to take Chief Black Bear with us when we go down. But you see, I can't do much with this wounded arm of mine."

"Don't worry about that, Corporal," said Morgan

promptly. "We'll get on quite well with the two fellows we brought along from Prince Albert. Ward and I are not exactly novices with canoes. So we'll be fine and dandy." He lowered his voice to a whisper: "Say, what do you think they'll do to Smiley? Hang him?"

Mason inclined his head gravely.

"Quite likely," he said.

Both Morgan and Ward again looked over towards Smiley, compassion in their eyes.

"Poor devil," muttered Morgan under his breath.

"No wonder he looks down in the mouth. Dying is bad enough, but hanging. Brrrr!"

He shuddered as he spoke.

CHAPTER XVI

MASON got his prisoner down to Portage Bend without any mishap or incidents. Chief Black Bear went down with them himself. At the Stony River Reserve he picked up two of his men, who were to accompany them in another canoe, which was also to take the chief home from Portage Bend. In this canoe were carried all the bedding and other baggage of the party, so as to leave ample room in Mason's own canoe for himself and his prisoner. The chief and MacDonald navigated this canoe.

The prisoner was sulkily defiant all the way down, and hardly spoke to any of his companions. After the first shock of being arrested had worn off, he had begun to think the situation over, and he had come to the conclusion that his position was not at all as desperate as he had first thought. As far as he could see, the Police could only have the flimsiest evidence against him. And he had no doubt that a clever lawyer could easily tear it to shreds. And he would take good care that he obtained the best criminal lawyer that could be procured to conduct his defence.

But when he arrived in Portage Bend his new-won confidence was rudely shaken. The coroner's court was promptly reconvened, and both in that court and later before the local magistrate Smiley was confronted with a mass of evidence which fairly staggered him.

Witnesses appeared from Winnipeg who identified him as the absconded broker. Three handwriting experts testified on oath that the handwriting in letters, proved beyond a doubt to have been written by Smiley, was identical in every particular with the handwriting on the blaze Mason had brought down from the claim, signed by

"John Smith". Joe Sayese, the half-breed, testified that Joe Warner had bought his dogs, and MacDonald and Bancroft described how they had met the prisoner driving those very dogs. They both gave such a wealth of details to explain how they had been able to recognize the dogs that it was considered quite impossible that they could have made any mistake. And they both were emphatic in their identification of Smiley. Furthermore, the man who had bought the dogs from Smiley in Prince Albert had been located, and he also identified the accused as the man from whom he had bought the dogs. Then the two men who had seen Smiley and Warner on the trail together were produced, and they both swore positively that Smiley was the man who had been Warner's companion. Even Charley, of "Charley's Place" fame, was summoned as a witness. And his evidence proved to be about the most sensational of the lot, although his actual evidence was simple enough. He merely testified that the prisoner had passed through his camp one of the first days of December, though he could not swear to the exact date. But what caused the sensation was that the majority of Charley's old friends now heard for the first time that he really had a surname. It was actually established that his full name was Charles Gilbert Hunter, and that he had a small farm near Winnipegosis, which his wife and sons ran during his absences in the winter seasons. This was news indeed. Nobody had even suspected that Charley had a family.

Finally the clerk at the Palace Hotel identified Smiley as a man who had registered at the hotel under the name of Brown about the time when Warner departed for the North. The hotel register showed that this man Brown had checked in on the date before Warner pulled out, and that he had left on the following morning. At least, the records showed that he had paid his bill the night before, and nobody had seen him around the hotel after that.

The proceedings were lengthy, owing to the time required to summon the widely scattered witnesses. But at last the end came, and Smiley was committed for trial on the charge of murder.

Then, the following day, after Smiley had had a lengthy interview with his lawyer, the prisoner declared that he

was prepared to make a statement. This was the story he told:

"Towards the end of the month of October last I found myself faced by utter ruin and disgrace. I had made quite a few unfortunate speculations on the stock-market, and when conditions grew bad I borrowed money, advanced by customers, to cover margins, and also in an effort to retrieve my losses. But in the end I lost all, and I did not know which way to turn.

"Then, one of the first days of November, Joe Warner came to see me. I knew him before that, as I had helped him on several occasions to get in touch with prospective buyers for mineral-claims he had located from time to time.

"Warner told me in strict confidence that he knew where a rich, gold-bearing quartz-vein was located up in the north country. He showed me samples of quartz and an assayer's report to prove his story. As I knew Warner to be a very reliable man, I at once believed his statement. He went on to explain that he had so far not had the opportunity to stake a claim in the locality, but that he wanted to go up immediately and attend to the matter. The trouble was, however, that he had no funds with which to buy dogs and provisions for his journey. So he proposed to me that I advance the money for the grub-stake on the condition that he give me a half-interest in the claim. Warner, of course, had no idea about the state of my business. He thought I was rather well-to-do.

"His proposal immediately showed me a way out of my difficulties. I decided, after considering the matter for a while, that I would convert every security I could lay my hands on into cash, and then slip away with Warner. Then when we had staked the claim, I would sell out my interest in it as quickly as I could, and then slip into the States under a new name, and start life all over again.

"As a first step I told Warner I would go with him, but to this suggestion he at first objected strongly. He said he intended to travel fast, and was afraid that I should not be able to keep up with him. He also described the rigours, discomforts, and hazards of a winter journey up

into the North, and said he was afraid I should not be able to stand it. But when I made it quite plain to him that that was the only condition on which I would join him in the venture, he at last reluctantly gave in. Next I impressed on Warner the utter necessity for absolute secrecy. I pointed out to him that I was fairly well known as being interested in mining-property, and if anyone should come to know that we were partners in some venture, other prospectors might follow on our trail and might make difficulties. I had dealt a lot with prospectors, and knew how jealously they always tried to conceal the locality in which they thought they had made a rich strike, so I knew this was a safe line to take with Warner. In fact, he found it quite natural and reasonable, and in the end we agreed that he should proceed to Portage Bend at once, buy dogs, provisions, and equipment, and get everything ready for the journey. Then I was to arrive in Portage Bend on November the fifteenth, register in one of the hotels under an assumed name, and on the following morning, before anyone was about, I was to meet him down on the Saskatchewan River on the trail for the North.

"As soon as Warner had left I set about completing my own arrangements. I was able to realize about twelve hundred dollars on securities of various sorts entrusted to me, and I quietly expressed my personal belongings to Regina in the name of John Smith, to be held till called for. Then I told my office staff that I had to go down to Toronto for a fortnight on business. This would give me at least a fortnight's start before anyone would become suspicious, and that was more than I needed.

"Then I slipped up to Portage Bend, and acted according to previous arrangements. I did not go near Warner until I joined him at the point agreed on an hour before day-break on November the sixteenth, and from there we started our journey together. From the time I left Winnipeg I had let my moustache and beard grow, as a means of disguise, and it was not many days before I was quite bearded. As a further precaution I held my face turned away as much as possible when we met any persons on the trail, which was seldom, and I also had the hood of my caribou coat pulled far down over my face. I was afraid

that as soon as my defalcations were discovered down in Winnipeg, a hue and cry would start; and, of course, the last thing I wanted to happen was for anybody to recognize me and inform the Police about the route I had taken.

"I soon found that Warner had made no misstatement when he told me that he intended to travel fast. He drove me relentlessly till I was ready to drop, and to my expostulations, and demands for rest, he merely answered that he had warned me beforehand, that it had been my own deliberate choice to go with him, so now I had to take the consequences and try to bear them like a man. And in addition to this relentless driving, I suffered agonies from cold, exposure, and all the other discomforts of the journey. And I soon began to hate Warner from the bottom of my heart. I blamed him entirely for my sufferings and discomforts. And as this feeling of hatred grew daily, I began to ask myself why I should share the claim with him at all? And I soon decided that I would try to find some way to get it all for myself. So gradually a plan to this end began to develop in my mind.

"As a first step I knew I had to gain Warner's confidence, so he would not form any suspicions. With that end in view I carefully began to conceal my violent dislike for the man, and began to cultivate his friendship. Warner seemed very pleased at my overtures, and evidently thought my previous surliness had just been caused by the hardships I had been enduring, and that I had now got over it. So every night at the camp-fire I drew him out, and had him explain to me the exact location of the vein, how to get there in the winter, and how to get there in the summer. And Warner, who was quite without suspicions, readily gave me all the information I wanted. He even drew a rough map for me of the locality, showing the roads in both by winter and summer.

"By the time we arrived at our destination we were apparently on the best of terms. I also felt much better physically. My muscles had hardened during the trip, and I was no longer so acutely aware of all the discomforts. But the idea of tricking Warner out of his share in the claim had taken firm hold in my mind, and I had worked out all the details of a scheme which I felt sure would

serve my purpose. But I must state here most emphatically that I had no thought in my head at any time of causing Warner any bodily harm.

"As soon as we had established our camp, we set out to search for the place where Warner's Indian friend had made his discovery. This proved to be easy, as the old Indian's instructions had been very explicit and detailed. The vein looked even more promising than I had dared to hope. There was no doubt that this was the surface outcrop of a very rich gold-bearing lode. And my resolve to annex the claim for myself alone grew more determined than ever.

"By the time we had located the vein it was near dusk, and as we couldn't do more that day we returned to camp feeling very satisfied, and even jubilant. After supper Warner suggested that we should stake one claim each, so that we could take in as much territory as possible, but this plan was abandoned, as we couldn't agree on who should stake the claim over the actual vein. Warner evidently didn't trust me far enough to let me stake that claim for myself, and I certainly was not going to let him stake that claim, so we finally dropped that plan.

"That night as we prepared to roll into our bedding I began the preparations for my plan. I told Warner that as he was in the habit of snoring heavily and noisily in his sleep, and as I was tired lying awake listening to him, I was going to sleep as far away from him as possible at the other end of the fire. Warner laughed good-naturedly, and remarked that if his snoring was as bad as all that he didn't blame me for wanting to keep as far away from him as I could at night. He had not the slightest suspicion that I had any other motive than the one I had stated.

"The following day we duly staked the claim. When we first started out on our journey I had intended to advance some plausible excuse for substituting the name of John Smith for my own on the inscription on the stakes, but this was now unnecessary. I had decided that by the time we left there would be quite different inscriptions on the stakes from those Warner now wrote.

"When we had finished our task, we tramped around in the neighbourhood to see if we could find any further outcrop of quartz on cliff walls or rocks, so that we in that

way might be able to establish the possible run of the main lode, but in this we were unsuccessful. And as there was nothing more for us to do up there, we decided to start our homeward journey on the following morning.

"That night, after we had rolled in, I put my plan into execution. When I heard that Warner was obviously fast asleep, I rolled quietly and carefully out of my bedding, and arranged some spruce-boughs from the spruce-mat under me, so that it would appear to a casual observer that I was still inside my bedding. Then I got up and stole silently over to the fringe of the forest. There I stopped and watched the camp for some moments, but Warner never stirred. Even the dogs seemed fast asleep. As soon as I felt quite sure that Warner had not been disturbed by my movements I turned away, and walked quickly up to the claim over the trail our tracks had made in the snow.

"A full moon was shining, which made the night almost as bright as day. The moonlight was a great help to me in what I intended to do; but I had an electric torch in my pack, which would have served if the night had been dark. As soon as I got up to the first stake I took out the heavy hunting-knife I carried in a sheath on my belt, and began to pare off the inscription Warner had made. When this was done, I substituted another, which stated that the claim had been staked solely by John Smith. Then I continued along the trail up to the discovery stake, which I treated in the same way. My scheme was simply to obliterate all Warner's inscriptions, and substitute the other. When we then got to Prince Albert, where we had intended to wind up our journey, as the claim was located in Saskatchewan, and the nearest Land Office in the Province was in that town, I would somehow arrange to get to the Land Office ahead of Warner, and register the claim there under the name of John Smith. Then the claim would be legally mine in my identity as John Smith, and Warner couldn't do a thing about it. And again I want to repeat here solemnly, before God, that I at no time intended to offer any violence to Warner, and much less did I intend to cause his death. My plan was reprehensible trickery, I'll admit, but it did not constitute a crime in law.

"When I had completed my task at the discovery stake

I continued over the ridge to the second stake at the end of the line. I had just finished whittling away Warner's inscription with my knife, when I heard a sound behind me. I turned, and to my utter consternation and dismay I saw Warner coming charging at me along the trail like a mad bull. Obviously he had discovered what I had done to the other stakes, and knew what my game was. I don't know what had awakened him, or what suspicion had sent him out to search for me, but there he was. I have never in my life seen a more appalling and terrifying vision in my life of wild, almost insane rage than Warner presented then. His face was working with passion, and if I ever saw a desire to kill in any man's face, I saw it then. I'm not a coward as a rule, but I will admit that at the sight of Warner, as he looked there in the moonlight, I turned cold with fear. It must be remembered that he was a much stronger and heavier man than me, and though he was older, he was hard as nails.

"I could not run away from him. I had no snowshoes, and beyond the stake was deep snow. I couldn't have taken more than a few steps before he would have overtaken me. And I feared for my life. All I could do was to brandish my knife at the charging man, and shout to him that I would defend myself if he attacked me. But he was obviously far beyond heeding any warning. He never spoke a word, but flung himself straight at me.

"In my terror I must have completely lost my head for the moment, for the next clear impression I had was of Warner uttering a terrible cry. For a moment his hands clawed wildly the air above him, and then he crashed backwards into the snow, my knife buried to the hilt in his chest. His body twitched for a few moments, and then he lay still.

"For a long time I stood staring down at the body, overwhelmed with horror, my mind quite numb. I felt as if my whole body had turned to stone. How it had all happened I didn't know. I had not had any intention of using my knife on Warner. I had only threatened him with it, to try to stop his wild charge at me. I could remember nothing of what actually had occurred during that short, mad tussle after he had flung himself on me.

I must have used my knife quite automatically, yielding to the subconscious instinct of self-preservation which comes to all of us in moments of danger. But, however that was, I had killed a fellow man, and for the moment I was overcome with terror and remorse.

"But gradually my mind cleared. And then I saw to its full extent the terrible position I had put myself in. I felt that nobody would believe my story, and felt convinced that I should be accused of having murdered Warner to get the claim for myself. So what was to be done? Obviously the safest way out was to say nothing about it to anybody. Nobody knew where Warner had gone, and I felt certain that nobody could identify me as his companion. So I decided that all I had to do was to get rid of Warner's body, and nobody would ever know what had happened to him. If he should be missed, nobody would know where to look for him, and it would gradually be supposed that he had perished somewhere up in the wilderness. That reasoning appeared quite sound to me, so I decided to act on it.

"The first problem that presented itself was how to get rid of the body. I couldn't bury it then, as the ground was frozen too hard to make digging possible. And I could not leave him near the claim. I thought of taking the body with me on the sleigh for a few days on the return trip, and then conceal it in the bush in some convenient spot, but my nerve failed me. I knew I simply couldn't stand the ordeal of taking the body with me. So I had to find some other way.

"Suddenly I remembered that Warner had told me that this part of the country was rarely visited by anyone, except perhaps an occasional roving hunter. So I finally decided to hide the body in some thick clump of brush, cover it with snow, and then come up here next summer and bury it. I knew I should have to come back up to show the claim to any prospective buyer of it. And when I first got up here I could easily slip away from my companions, if I had any, and bury the body without anyone being any the wiser. Having decided on this, I bent over the body and removed my knife, a ghastly, grisly task which still makes me shiver when I think of it. Next

I hurried back to the camp and got my snow-shoes and one of our shovels, and with these I returned to the body.

"I walked around for a while beyond the stake, looking for a suitable place in which to conceal the body, and finally decided on the spot where the body was subsequently found. Then followed the horrible, nightmarish business of dragging the body over the snow to the place I had selected. Once I had placed it in the thicket, and after I had covered it well with snow, I breathed easier. I obliterated as well as I could with my spade and a spruce-bough the tracks I had made up to that spot, and the groove ploughed by the body, so, in case any hunter should happen along before the next snow-fall, there would be no tracks to arouse his curiosity, and lead him to the body.

"As soon as all this was done, I hurried back to camp. Daylight was still several hours away, but I hurriedly packed all our stuff in the sleigh, harnessed up the dogs, and started out on the return journey. The sleigh-track we had made coming up was still perfectly plain in the moonlight, and quite smooth. And I wanted to hurry back to the main trail before we had a snow-fall. If a blizzard should overtake me before I reached the main trail I knew I should be in a very precarious position. Of course, I knew that if I travelled straight west I would some time, sooner or later, strike the trail, but the country was wild and rough, so I doubted I should be able to make it if there was no trail to follow.

"But fortune seemed to favour me, and it was not till I had travelled southwards for two days on the main trail that there was a snow-fall. Then I rather welcomed it, because now all tracks up by the claim would be definitely wiped out. So I felt perfectly safe, and was convinced my secret would be hidden for ever. All the articles on the sleigh which had belonged to Warner I had tossed away up in the woods.

"It never even entered my head that a search would be made for Warner so soon, nor had I any idea that those chips I had hacked off the stakes up at the claim could ever be reconstructed and used as evidence against me. And I never thought that anyone could identify the dogs I was driving as the team Joe Warner had bought at Portage

Bend. I can see now that I overlooked many things in my inexperience, and that my best course would have been to tell my story at once, and then taken my medicine. But there was still one consideration, that if I had followed that course, I should have been identified immediately as Smiley, and that was another thing I didn't want to happen. I hoped I had taken leave of J. A. Smiley for ever, and that I should now be able to start life all over again under another name.

"I got to Prince Albert without any trouble, and at once registered my claim at the Land Office. From there I continued to Regina, where I reclaimed the luggage I had forwarded from Winnipeg. And in due course of time I retrieved the registration certificate for my claim from the post office.

"I daily bought copies of the Prince Albert papers, and of the one issued at Portage Bend, to see if Warner had been reported as missing, and if any search had been started for him. But as time passed, and I saw not the slightest reference to him, I felt that I had no further cause for worry. But I knew there was the possibility, however remote, that somebody might stumble on Warner's body by accident. And so I thought it best to let John Smith, who might be considered a possible link with the body, disappear for ever from the scene. I promptly changed my name to C. Weaver, faked the bill of sale later found in my possession, and felt that it would now be quite impossible to connect me with what had taken place up at the claim, even if Warner's body should be found. To prevent anybody recognizing me as Smiley I kept the full beard I had been growing during the trip, only trimmed it a little, and started wearing glasses in public.

"Disguised in this manner I travelled down to Minneapolis, where I knew of a firm which was interested in gold-mining, and which I knew had bought up considerable mining-property in Northern Canada. When I produced my samples of quartz, the assayer's report, the registration certificate, and the bill of sale, they were immediately interested, and they were quite satisfied that everything was just as it appeared on the surface. They eventually informed me that they would consider buying my claim,

provided I agreed to take two mining engineers in their employ up there in the spring, as soon as the rivers and lakes were free of ice, so that they could examine the claim and report on the probable value of it. As soon as the engineers' report was to hand the firm would then make me an offer.

"Of course, I agreed to their terms. I felt convinced there could not possibly be any danger for me in returning up there. And besides, this would give me a chance to bury Warner's body for good.

"As soon as it was reported that the rivers and lakes north of Prince Albert were navigable for canoes, I started up for that town in company with Ward and Morgan, the two mining engineers. There we bought two canoes, purchased the necessary provisions and equipment, and hired two half-breeds to go with us as guides and general help. Warner had told me, when I pumped him on our journey, that it would be easy to find some Indian up on the Stony River Reserve to act as guide for the last lap of the journey up to the claim, if I explained to him its exact position according to Warner's instructions and his rough map.

"Unfortunately for me we pulled out of Prince Albert a couple of days before Warner's body reached Portage Bend, as I now know. If we had left a few days later I might have seen something about the first inquest in the papers, and that might have served me as a warning to clear out. Though that is not quite certain. By that time I felt so confident of having covered up my tracks so completely that the crime could not possibly be brought home to me. If anyone would be blamed, it would be John Smith, and John Smith had disappeared, God knows where, ostensibly with my thousand dollars in his pocket. So even if I had read about the inquest I really doubt that I should have drawn back, especially as the first verdict indicated, I understand, that nothing was known of how Warner had come to his death. But as I mentioned, I was not called upon to take any decision. I started out quite convinced that Warner had so far not even been missed.

"Not much more need be said in this statement. We got up to Stony River Reserve without difficulties. We heard no rumours at any of the trading-posts we passed

about any man being missing, or any body being found, so I felt quite safe. At Stony River Reserve we hired a guide who took us up to the claim. Later I got to know that our guide was the chief of the Reserve, that he was acting under instructions from the Police, and that he had been one of the men who actually found Warner's body.

"Shortly after we arrived at the claim Corporal Mason appeared, and I was arrested, as described at the inquest, and at the proceedings before the magistrate.

"I solemnly declare that the foregoing account of the circumstances surrounding Warner's death is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God. I state again, that at no time had I any intention of causing bodily harm to Warner, and not the slightest intention of killing him. At the time of our last, unfortunate encounter I was beside myself with fear at his apparent murderous rage, and whatever I did I did quite involuntarily, actuated by an instinct of self-preservation. So I think it can be truly said that I killed Warner in self-defence, when I thought my own life was threatened, and that I could hardly be held responsible for my actions at the time."

This statement was signed by Smiley, and duly witnessed. He asked permission to swear to the truth of his statement, but after a consultation between the magistrate and Inspector Weston it was considered that this question had better be decided by the judge who was to preside at Smiley's trial.

Two days later Corporal Mason escorted the prisoner down to Prince Albert, where he was lodged in jail to await trial, which would take place in two months' time. And a very despondent and saddened prisoner he looked when Mason left him in the jail office. Mason almost felt sorry for him, despite the fact that he had killed Mary Warner's father.

But when the corporal presented himself up at headquarters on the top of the hill behind the town, his thoughts were soon turned into other and more pleasant channels. As soon as he reported, he was informed that the Superintendent wanted to see him at once in his office, so Mason hastened thither.

The Superintendent received him with a smile, shook

hands, and complimented him in very flattering terms on his work in the Warner case. And while Mason was still reeling slightly under these unusual and obvious signs of favour the Superintendent sprang still another bomb-shell. He informed Mason that his promotion to sergeant had just been approved, and again his superior officer held out his hand to him in congratulation. For a moment Mason felt as if someone had suddenly pulled the floor away from under him, but it speaks well for his training that even in this moment of utter confusion he managed to retain an attitude of "smart and soldier-like bearing", quite in accordance with the King's Regulations. He took the proffered hand, standing strictly to attention, and even managed to stammer a few suitable words of thanks.

When he left the Superintendent's office he felt as if he were treading on air. As soon as he had closed the door behind him he felt like dancing a Highland fling or something, but this proved impractical, as he had entered the orderly-room, where several clerks were about. But he did allow himself the luxury of a wide grin.

The sergeant-major stepped up to him, and held out his hand.

"Congratulations, Sergeant Mason," he said. "The Super told me about your promotion earlier this morning, so I know what that grin means." And the sergeant-major actually smiled. Up to then Mason had belonged to the school of thought that contended that sergeant-majors were unable to smile.

"Thank you very much, sir," answered Mason, blushing a little at hearing himself addressed by his new rank.

"Better run along to the quartermaster-sergeant and get your issue of chevrons," continued the sergeant-major. "He knows about your promotion, so he'll be expecting you. You can't walk around improperly dressed."

"No, I suppose that wouldn't do at all, sir," grinned Mason. "I'll go straight over to the Q.M.S. and get the chevrons, and have the tailor stick them on."

"Right oh, my lad. See you later." And the sergeant-major entered the Superintendent's office, while Sergeant Mason laid a joyful course for the quartermaster-sergeant's office.

CHAPTER XVII

SERGEANT MASON was detained for more than a week up at Prince Albert. There was quite a lot of discussions between certain officers of the Crown and the Police regarding several phases of Smiley's forthcoming trial in view of the latter's statement; and Mason was frequently questioned regarding different aspects of the case. These deliberations also involved a trip to Regina for Mason, and an interview at the Attorney-General's office.

Mason chafed at all these delays. The town of Horton exerted an extraordinary and insistent pull on him. Since his return with Smiley from the North he had been kept so busy that it had proved impossible for him to run down to call on Mary Warner, though the desire had been almost all-consuming. But duty was duty, and could not be circumvented.

Of course he had written several letters to her both from Portage Bend and later from Prince Albert. In fact, he had developed a passion for letter-writing. And formerly he had considered the task of writing letters one of the most boring in life.

Mary Warner had always promptly answered each of his letters, and their tone had invariably been so friendly, and even intimate, that Mason's hopes flared high.

He was firmly resolved to stop over at Horton on his return journey to Portage Bend, come what may. He simply had to see Mary Warner. And he hoped that he should be able to find out her exact feelings for him.

He had not told her about his recent promotion. That he was going to spring on her as a surprise.

At last, on a lovely Saturday evening towards the middle of July, he was at last free to leave Prince Albert. And he was in very exuberant spirits, and was tingling with

anticipation. And it was certainly a stroke of luck that this was Saturday! If he left by the afternoon train he would get to Horton about eight o'clock that same night, and he could spend the whole evening and all of Sunday with Mary. There was no train-connection with Portage Bend before Monday morning. Yes, Mason was firmly of the opinion that the Fates were smiling on him. His friends in Prince Albert had tried to persuade him to remain there over the week-end, they even pointed out to him the matter of unfavourable train-connections; but he remained adamant in his purpose. He explained to his rather surprised friends that he had an important matter of business to attend to "along the line", and with this very vague and ambiguous explanation they had to be satisfied.

Mason had not informed Mary about the time of his arrival. That was going to be another surprise.

The sun was still above the rim of the prairie when Mason arrived at the small and insignificant town, which he, however, was inclined to consider rather as the hub of the whole universe.

He had eaten his supper in the dining-car on the train, so as soon as he had booked a room at the hotel, and had left his bag, he set off for Mary Warner's home.

He hoped fervently that he would find her in. But if she should happen to be out, he would sit on the porch and wait until she returned. He was rather sorry now that he had not informed her of his arrival.

He cast appreciative glances about him as he strode along. Horton was really a nice, tidy little town, he decided. Last time he had visited it, it had not looked so very prepossessing. But then it had been early spring. The trees had been bare, and the gardens had been only muddy patches of earth. But now the trees were standing in the full glory of their foliage, and the gardens were a riot of sweet-smelling flowers. Birds were chirping everywhere, and insects were humming in the air.

When he arrived at his destination he looked with approval at the small garden in front of the house as he passed through the gate in the fence. Evidently Mary was a keen gardener. Almost the whole plot held flower-beds, and they were all now a riot of colour.

Mary Warner was obviously at home, for he heard voices through the screen-door on the porch. He frowned slightly when he heard that one of the voices was that of a man. This started a rather unpleasant train of thought.

He had got to the foot of the stairs leading up to the porch, when he stopped dead. He had heard footsteps coming towards the small hall, and he had heard a masculine voice utter these words, evidently the end of a sentence:

" . . . and you have no idea, Mary, how happy I feel now, when everything about our wedding has been definitely settled."

" And I'm glad, too, Don, that you are happy," came Mary's voice, very softly, it appeared to Mason.

The man suddenly laughed, a ringing, happy, joyous laugh, which seemed to pierce the unhappy Mason's heart.

" Happy! " cried the man. " And why shouldn't I be happy, when next week the sweetest girl on earth will be my wife. Gosh! The only thing is that the week seems as long as a year to me! "

When he heard these words Mason saw all his airy castles crashing dismally to the ground, as completely and definitely as the walls of Jericho when the trumpets sounded. He wanted to rush away from there, but for the moment he felt as if his whole body was paralysed. He could only stand there as if rooted to the spot, while his heart felt frozen within him.

Mary Warner and her companion must have been moving into the hall from the sitting-room while they were talking, for suddenly Mason saw the figure of a man outlined on the other side of the screen-door. The man also immediately discovered the red-coated figure at the bottom of the steps.

" Hello! " he called with great good humour. " Here's a visitor for you, Mary, I think."

When he heard these words Mason pulled himself together with a supreme effort. It was too late to flee now, so he had to go on.

He mounted the steps, feeling like he was about to mount the scaffold, just as Mary appeared beside the man on the other side of the screen-door.

" Oh, it's Corporal Mason," she cried gaily, pushing the

door open. "How are you, Corporal? This is a pleasant surprise. Come right in."

Mason entered the hall. He even tried to smile, though he was afraid it would prove a ghastly failure.

"How-do-you-do, Miss Warner," he greeted formally, holding out his hand. He discovered that she looked rather flushed and a little confused. And well she may, was his silent, bitter comment to himself. He felt that she had betrayed him shamelessly.

"I'm very glad to see you," said Mary, shaking his hand cordially. "I hoped you'd be able to come down soon. This is Mr. Walsh," she continued, introducing her companion. "Corporal Mason."

Mason felt too depressed to correct her mistake in his rank. His promotion had completely lost its charm.

"Pleased to meet you, Corporal," said Walsh promptly, holding out his hand with a friendly smile. "I've heard a lot about you from Mary."

"How-do-you-do," said Mason, shaking hands stiffly. He was decidedly not pleased to meet Mr. Walsh, so he was not going to sully his lips with such an appalling falsehood. But he quietly took stock of the man, nevertheless.

Most people would have found Don Walsh's appearance rather pleasant and prepossessing. He had a nice, open face, and he had the appearance and figure of an out-of-door man, who was much given to exercise. He was about the same height as Mason, and was well-built, and looked wiry.

But Mason missed all these points. To him the young man looked a particularly nasty and noisome specimen of the genus *homo*. His friendly smile appeared to Mason as an overbearing, triumphant leer. In short, Mason hated Mr. Walsh heartily on the spot, as the snake in the grass, that had stolen Mary Warner from him.

"Well, I must run along," said Mr. Walsh, looking at his watch. "I'm late already. So-long, Mary. So-long, Corporal." And without further leave-taking he took his hat, opened the screen-door, and sped away. Mason was genuinely grateful that he had not taken a sentimental farewell with his fiancée before his, Mason's eyes. That would have been more than he could have stood just then.

"Please come inside and sit down," invited Mary, smiling at him. Then suddenly she bent a little forward and stared at his right sleeve, where the new gold chevrons glittered on the red. "Oh, but you've got one more stripe!" she cried eagerly. "You've been promoted. And you never told me."

"I got my third stripe when I was up in Prince Albert," explained Mason indifferently, as he hung his Stetson hat up on the rack in the hall.

"Congratulations!" she cried, rushing towards him and taking his hand. "I'm so glad. You certainly did deserve it!"

"Thank you, Miss Warner," said Mason formally. He was feeling too miserable to be able to unbend.

She looked up at him, a queer expression on her face. There was puzzlement and something else in her glance. Her smile faded, and she dropped his hand.

"Well, let us go in and sit down," she said, turning and leading the way into the sitting-room.

"How is your arm, Corporal? Or, Sergeant, I should say," she said as soon as they were both seated. "Mrs. Weston wrote and told me you had been shot when you arrested that man." Her voice now sounded quite as formal as Mason's.

"Oh, that was only a scratch. It healed long ago."

Again she shot a quick glance at him. She seemed utterly bewildered and even hurt by his rather brusque, stiff attitude. But Mason was too full of his own mental misery to recognize these signs. An atmosphere of gloom seemed to have stolen into the room, though it was still full daylight outside.

"How long are you going to stay?" ventured Mary.

"I'm taking the first train out to-morrow morning," answered Mason. "I just called in here to tell you about a few things you ought to know."

"I see. And what are those things?"

"Well, about that man who killed your father."

"I see. And what do you think is going to happen to him?"

"Well, after much discussion the prosecution decided to reduce the charge of murder against him to one of man-

slaughter. They were inclined to believe that his statement about the whole matter was true. It was argued that if he had premeditated murder he would have made much better plans for disposing of the body. And besides, the weapon used rather bears out his story. Anglo-Saxons very rarely use the knife for a murder-weapon. And, of course, there was his statement against purely circumstantial evidence of murder, so it was finally decided that it would simplify the trial a lot if he was charged with manslaughter. But considering all the circumstances, he will get a very heavy sentence. At least twenty years, probably life. So he will be punished, all right."

"I am glad they are not going to hang him. I always thought hanging was too brutal and gruesome a punishment for any crime."

"No. He won't hang. And it's lucky for him that he's not going to go on trial on the murder-charge. I rather think the jury would have found him guilty. As it is, he'll get a much lighter sentence than he deserves. However, there is another matter I have to discuss with you. Our Superintendent up at Prince Albert was kind enough, after I asked him, to take up the matter with the proper authorities, whether you were entitled to a share in the mining claim your father had discovered, considering all the circumstances. He was informed that there was little doubt that if the matter was taken into court you would be awarded a half-share. Smiley, the accused man, was informed of this, and then he immediately proposed to deed half of the claim to you, as a sort of restitution. I suppose he thought a gesture like that might cause him more lenient treatment by the judge when his sentence is considered. So papers to that effect are being prepared and will be forwarded to you shortly."

"Thank you for all your trouble. But I'm not going to accept it," she stated flatly and firmly. "I don't want to have anything to do with that horrible claim that cost Dad his life."

"But listen, Miss Warner!" protested Mason. "That's a rather morbid stand to take. A half of that claim will be valuable. You know that two mining engineers went up there with Smiley to look over the claim, and before we

left they had been up having a look at the out-crop of gold-bearing quartz. And they told me that they had not the slightest doubt that the claim would prove very rich. And you are certainly entitled to your father's share, both legally and morally."

"No matter whether it is valuable or not, I'll have nothing to do with it!" reiterated Mary firmly. "I would feel as if there was a curse on any money coming from that source. Look how much mischief that claim has wrought already. And besides, do you think for a moment that I intend to enter into a sort of partnership with the man who killed Dad? No. That man cheated and killed to get the claim for himself, and now he can have it as far as I'm concerned. I don't think the possession is going to bring him any happiness."

"Now, please be sensible, Miss Warner," pleaded Mason, warming to his task, and forgetting his misery for the moment. "There is no question of entering into any sort of partnership with that man Smiley. Those two mining engineers are acting for a big American mining-concern, which intends to buy the claim outright if the reports of their two men are favourable. So the concern will deal directly with you, and you'll have nothing whatever to do with Smiley. And there is certain to be quite a few thousand dollars in your half-share."

"I don't care if there were a million dollars in it. I simply won't touch the money. I almost feel as if the claim, and everything connected with it, was accursed, and that it would only mean trouble and sorrow in the end to be in any way mixed up in it."

"But that is ridiculous, Miss Warner!" protested Mason. "It would practically mean to throw away a small fortune. And that is a stupid thing to do. I mean, money always comes in useful. And I should think it would come in particularly handy now, when you are about to be married." The last sentence slipped out of Mason quite unintentionally, in his eagerness to prove his point. He had not intended to let her know that he knew.

But he was not quite prepared for the way in which she reacted to his tactless remark. Dusk had begun to

invade the room, but there was still light enough to show him that she was staring at him in wide-eyed amazement.

"What do you mean by that?" she asked.

"I'm awfully sorry," he stammered in confusion. "I—I didn't know it was a secret."

"A secret?"

"Yes. That you are going to marry Mr. Walsh, I mean."

"What put the idea into your head that I was going to marry Mr. Walsh?"

"I heard him say so. I mean, I happened to overhear what he said to you. These are about his own words: 'I'm so happy that everything about our wedding is now definitely settled.'"

"And later he said: 'I'm feeling happy because in a week's time the sweetest girl in the world will be my wife,' or something like . . ."

He broke off, and stared with bulging eyes at Mary. She had collapsed in her chair and was laughing helplessly and unrestrainedly.

"That's really too funny," she gasped.

"What's so funny?" asked Mason.

"That you think I'm going to marry Don Walsh," she chortled.

"Well, aren't you?"

"Of course I'm not. He was not referring to mine and his wedding, but the wedding between him and my best pal in town."

"But—but—but he said he was marrying the sweetest girl in the world," stammered Mason, still not convinced that he had understood correctly.

"Well, I'm certainly not the sweetest girl in the world as far as Don Walsh is concerned," laughed Mary. "He was referring to his fiancée."

"Then you are really not about to get married?"

"Certainly not."

"What I mean is, you aren't engaged to be married, or anything like that?" persisted Mason, who wanted to get a firm grip on this altered situation.

"No. I'm not engaged to be married, or anything of the sort," admitted Mary with a smile. She did not seem

at all annoyed at Mason's rather personal questions. She seemed rather amused. She had just found the clue to several things that had puzzled her since Mason's arrival on the scene.

To Mason it seemed that he had never in his life seen a brighter and more cheerful room than this, though by now dusk was deepening.

"Thank God!" broke from his lips spontaneously and fervently. He felt that the world was a most wonderful place to be in.

"Why do you say: 'Thank God! '? " asked Mary, still smiling over at him. "It sounds as if you wish to consign me to perpetual spinsterhood."

"No, no! That's not what I mean at all!" retorted Mason quickly. "That's—that's . . ." He broke off and jumped to his feet. He walked to her chair and looked down at her. In this new jubilant mood he felt strong and masterful. "Listen, Mary," he said. "I wasn't going to say this just now, but I simply must. I love you, and I want you to marry me. Will you, Mary? I love you so very much. Is—is there any hope for me?" he ended a little wistfully.

Mary sat quite still looking up at him.

"But, Jimmy, you've really known me for such a short time. And we have really only seen each other on a couple of occasions. Are you quite sure that you know your own mind?"

"Am I sure! Listen, Mary. I have loved you from the first time I saw you on the railway platform up at Portage Bend. And since then you've never been out of my mind, night or day, wherever I've been. And every day I have felt more and more that you are the sweetest and most lovable girl in the world. What do you say, Mary?" he ended breathlessly.

"I'll confess something to you, Jimmy," said Mary with a tender smile. "One day up in Portage Bend a certain policeman seemed to find his way into my mind, and he has taken up a permanent abode there. And the more I came to know about that man, the more convinced I became that he was a man worthy of trust, respect, and love." The last word came almost in a whisper, and she

dropped her eyes when she said it; but Mason heard it plainly.

He immediately snatched one of Mary's hands.

"Then you mean that you will marry me?" he cried eagerly.

Mary merely inclined her head, but that was quite enough for Mason. And after that the world ceased to exist as far as they were concerned.

After a while, quite a long while, in fact, during which the growing dusk in the room had deepened, they again began to take an interest in mundane matters.

"Listen, darling," said Mason. "How did you come to call me Jimmy so pat, as it were. Of course, several of my friends call me Jimmy, but I didn't know you knew that dark secret."

"That's all you know about it," smiled Mary. "The first time I was up at Portage Bend I asked Mrs. Weston quite a few questions about you, for, strange as it may appear, I felt rather interested in you. And she happened to mention that your friends called you Jimmy. And after that you somehow became Jimmy in my mind."

Mason laughed joyfully, and pulled her closer to him.

"And do you know, darling. From the first moment I heard that your name was Mary, you became Mary in my thoughts. Funny how great minds work the same way."

Again the earth receded into the background for some moments.

"Oh, but Jimmy," said Mary after a while. "About that mining-claim. I really mean that I don't want to have anything to do with it."

"Who cares about the silly old claim?" asked Mason.

"Not me. I've just staked a claim worth more than all the gold-claims in the world."

"I'm sorry you have to leave to-morrow, Jimmy," said Mary after another blissful pause. "I wish you could have spent Sunday here with me. I should so like to introduce you to my friends."

"Who's leaving to-morrow?" asked Mason in obvious puzzlement. "I'm not leaving till Monday morning."

"But you said earlier you had to leave to-morrow on the first train."

"You must have misunderstood me. Absolutely misunderstood me," said Mason airily. "I had no intention whatever of leaving before Monday."

Suddenly Mary laughed.

"I know why you said you were leaving to-morrow," she chuckled. "It was because you thought I was going to marry Don Walsh."

"Well, and wasn't that more than enough reason to pull out as early as possible?" asked Mason. "But while we are speaking about Walsh. Do you think I could get an invitation for that wedding? You see, I'm entitled to a few days' leave, so I won't have any trouble getting down. And I thought it would be rather a good idea to study the technique of weddings with a little intelligent interest now that it's becoming of such absorbing personal interest to me."

"Oh, there won't be any trouble about that. They'll be glad to have you. Especially when they hear that we are engaged to be married. I'm going to be one of the bridesmaids."

"Fine!" exclaimed Mason. "I know I shall enjoy being present. You know, I rather like that fellow Walsh. Looks a very decent sort of a chap to me. I never knew a fellow I've taken so to right at the first sight. But, of course, he was no end of an ass when he said he was going to marry the sweetest girl in the world. No wonder he had me guessing!"

THE END

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